

AT THE EDGE

Exploring new
interpretations of
past and place in
archaeology, folklore
and mythology

No.10 June 1998

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Fairies

Ghosts

Earthlights



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*f*airies and their *R*in

Anno 1670, not far from Cirencester, was an apparition; being demanded whether a good spirit or a bad? returned no answer, but disappeared with a curious perfume and a most melodious twang. Mr W. Lilly believes it was a fairy.

John Aubrey

I did not go to see the exhibition of Victorian fairy paintings at the Royal Academy of Arts (Nov 1997 to Feb 1998). Nor, so far, have I seen Nick Willing's 1997 'adult thriller' film entitled *Photographing Fairies* – not to be confused with a different film starring Peter O'Toole that was inspired by the so-called Cottingley fairies Edwardian trick photographs. However, I am aware that all these projects have led to something of a glut of fairy fare in the media. The Fairy League and the National Fairy Appreciation Society (no, I kid you not!) both report booming interest. So it seems entirely appropriate to devote a major part of this issue of *At the Edge* to looking in more detail at fairies and related phenomena.

But this begs a few definitions – such as 'What are fairies?' and 'What is the difference between fairies and goblins, pixies, brownies, elves, gnomes, elementals and a whole host of other 'little folk'?' And, as if the answers to these two questions aren't tricky enough, what is the difference between fairies (and their ilk) and a whole range of other fleetingly-seen 'supernatural' events such as ghosts, will o'the wisps, earthlights, or even – and the similarities are greater than you might think – UFOs and 'alien abductions'?

In this article I will attempt to answer these three questions, although it might be better to say that I will be looking less at the differences between them than drawing attention to the close similarities.

Fairy fundamentals

*Up the airy mountain
Down the rushy glen
We daren't go a-hunting
For fear of little men*

William Allingham
The Fairies 1850

The English word 'fairy' comes to us, via the Old French *faerie*, from the Latin *fata*, meaning 'fate'. This means the roots are with the classical Greek Fates, who were believed to control the fate and destiny of the human race.

Early fourteenth century English literature appears to distinguish fairies from dwarves (goblin-like entities who lived in burial mounds); from brownies or hobgoblins (who lived in houses near the hearth and

performed domestic tasks); and from the fairy damsel or White Lady who was regarded as a benevolent guardian spirit or *genius loci* (Pemberton 1997). Further on the 'fringes' of such lore were mermaids, water spirits and sundry giants and monsters. Broadly speaking, these Middle English accounts conform broadly to the Anglo-Saxon categories of elves, dwarves and pucks (Griffiths 1996:47–54), so seem to represent some continuity of belief. Nevertheless, the roots of little folk are rather tangled. The notable historian of medieval religion and magic, Keith Thomas concludes that 'Ancestral spirits, ghosts, sleeping heroes, fertility spirits and pagan gods can all be discerned in the heterogenous fairy lore of medieval England' (Thomas 1971: 724).

Shakespeare's Titania and Oberon are King and Queen of the blithe subjects of the fairy kingdom forming part of the supernatural spectrum of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Such benevolent fairies have become the current archetype and today's children are brought up to think of fairies as diminutive beings of kindly disposition. However, accounts of medieval fairies show them to have been neither small nor particularly kindly. For many people, fairies were spirits against which they had to guard themselves by ritual precautions. By the Elizabethan

continued on page 3

Medieval Fairies: Now You See Them,

The origin of fairies is amongst the most discussed questions of folklore. They have been variously traced to nature spirits, the dead, elementals, pagan deities and so on. In support of their arguments,

researchers have turned to a handful of medieval texts, and occasionally to the evidence of placenames. But there is room for doubt whether these sources should be regarded as describing fairies at all.

The fairy tradition in literature begins in the 1380s, with Chaucer and Gower. In their eyes, the fairies are already a vanishing race, partly frightening and partly comic. The implication (particularly in the preamble to *The Wife of Bath's Tale*) is that people used to believe in fairies, but don't do so any more. However, the fairy mythology as a consistent set of beliefs (dancing in rings, living in hills, the rule of a queen, and so on) is itself created by the writers who claim to be recording its final echoes. Earlier evidence does not describe these fairies. Instead it details encounters with various supernatural beings who were, in retrospect, treated as if they had been citizens of fairyland.

The otherworldly beings who appear in medieval chronicles are a varied lot. Some of them, such as the barrow revellers in William of Newburgh and the maidens found in a wood by Wild Edric, are deliberately left unidentified; like the 'maiden in the moor' of the carol, their non-human status is indicated by allusion and not by direct statement. Others are defined by a single strange character-

istic, such as the colour of the Green Children of Woolpit, or the small size of King Herla (a *pygmaeus*) who rides a goat. The *homunculus* in an enigmatic encounter story from Thomas Walsingham was both diminutive and dressed in red. The otherworldly race who played with the boy Elidurus had their own language (a form of Greek) and their own, superior morals. There is nothing in these scattered references to suggest that the beings concerned are of the same type. Moreover, it would be an anachronism to separate these accounts from contemporary reports of diabolical apparitions. All the medieval words for spirits were also used, on occasion, for devils.

The achievement of fairy writers, from Chaucer to Shakespeare, was to expand the hints of an otherworld in the Breton courtly narratives until almost all previous tales of supernatural encounter could be shoehorned into their dominant discourse. Despite Bob Trubshaw's suggestion in the accompanying article that 'Broadly speaking, these Middle English accounts conform to the Anglo-Saxon categories of elves, dwarfs and pucks, so seem to represent some continuity of belief' there is no systematic mythology of fairies before 1380. There are many unrelated motifs – barrow-dwellers, tricksters, small people, household guardians – which we know in hindsight will come together to define the fairy kingdom. But this identity is simply not there in the original references.

Take a word like *elf*, which Chaucer makes synonymous with *fairy*. In Old English the *aelfs* are one amongst many otherworldly communities. The Charm for a Sudden Stitch puts them on the same footing as

hags and the Aesir; and they have the same role as the Aesir in name compounds – compare Aelfric and Osric. An Anglo-Saxon vocabulary of 1100 renders *dryades* etc. as types of elves. As Hilda Ellis Davidson showed in *The Road to Hel*, the Scandinavian elves are closely assimilated to the Vanir.

By the thirteenth century, the original context of Old English belief had become lost, and people were using the word in various ways. Layamon uses *elf* to translate the Romance *fadas* – following a line of thought which was to lead to the elf-fairy equivalence – but other people had other ideas. Robert of Gloucester, explaining what type of being it was that fathered Merlin, says that the sky is full of spiritual beings called elves. Here we are on the verge of the diabolical, as we are in *Beowulf* when the *aelfs* are of the seed of Cain.

Elves were found in literature, but not in the landscape. They do not appear in southern English placenames: nor, indeed, do fairies – not until the eighteenth century. Instead their place is taken by *puca*, which appears describing the inhabitants of wells, pits, and barrows. It is tempting to make the medieval *pouke* as identical with Renaissance Puck, but this is to fall into another retrospective reading. Even in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Puck has the appearance of being transferred into fairyland, a little awkwardly, from some quite separate tradition.

The situation is different in northern England, where *aelf* is common and *puca* is absent. This is also the region where *elf* was retained as the usual word for beings in the modern period, the Romance *fairy* being rejected. This may well be the result of Scandinavian influence – the fact that *aelf* is liable to compound

Now You Don't

with *haugr* rather than *beorg* would suggest this.

Scandinavian influence is certainly present in those placenames which refer to dwarfs. The Anglo-Saxons had no concept of the *dweorg* as a member of a small supernatural race. The word is always glossed as *nanus*, *pygmaeus*, and means a short human being. When we meet with clearly mythological dwarfs in North Country placenames, it seems reasonable to suspect Norse influence, as Keightley observed over a century ago.

In short, the origins of the fairy mythology lie not in the remote past, but at the court of Richard II. The creative synthesis which the poets made out of English and French traditions was developed in the Tudor period to include tricksters of the Robin Goodfellow type as well as the familiar spirits of cunning men, and domestic spirits like the brownie. As an English-language tradition, it was able to dominate and then change the native *sidhe* beliefs of Ireland and the Highlands, introducing alien notions such as small size into their narrative. By the nineteenth century, it was possible for Anglo-Saxon spirits like the *grima*, *scucca* and *thyrs* - who had lived out a quiet rural existence as Church Grims, Black Shucks and Hobthrushes - to find themselves reinterpreted by folklorists (not the folk!) as minor figures in the fairy mythology. This means that we can no longer make out what they were like originally. The fairy glamour of the fully developed tradition has tended to obscure our understanding of the very disparate narratives of supernatural encounters which have been patched into it.



As Jeremy Harte's review of the recent Royal Academy of Arts exhibition (see page 14) reveals, fairies have long been linked to erotic imagery. This candidate for Page 3 was encountered on the WWW although I regret not 'bookmarking' the location and therefore am not able to credit either the site or the artist.

era, town dwellers seem to have consigned such beliefs to the realms of childhood but there is clear evidence that the country people of the British Isles continued to show an 'astonishing reverence' for the fairies and dared not 'name them without honour' (Thomas 1971: 726 citing John Penry's *Three Treatises concerning Wales* c.1773). In 1911, Jonathan Caredig Davies published his *Folk-lore of West and mid-Wales*. No less than 60 pages are devoted to detailed accounts of fairy beliefs. Although he is poor at citing his

sources, we must assume that most of these were still current as folk tales in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Also in 1911, W.Y. Evans Wentz published his better-known book, *The fairy-faith in Celtic countries*. This took its place alongside Robert Kirk's *The secret common-wealth* (first published 1815 but written in 1691) and Thomas Keightley's *The fairy mythology* (1828) as the leading works of reference on fairy lore. Despite a substantial volume of literature, the next major study of fairies did not appear until 1959 when



The Lily Fairy by
Luis Ricardo Falero.

Katherine Briggs' *The Anatomy of Puck* was published, which lead in due course to her better-known *A dictionary of fairies* in 1976.

Fairies as phenomena

The modern superstition is that we're free of superstition.

Attributed to Frank Muir

Ignoring various members of the Theosophical Society (such as Geoffrey Hodson and Dora van Gelder) and the founders of the Findhorn Community, who have written books recounting what seem to be sincere experiences of encounters with a whole host of fairies and fairy-like folk, for most writers in the twentieth century fairies have been approached as folk-lore - tales of 'superstition' with little or no credibility, and in all probability diluted to be suitable as children's bed time stories. A key exception is Janet Bord's most recent book *Fairies*

- *Real encounters with little people* (1997) whose subtitle betrays a far more 'phenomenological' approach. This book surveys a wide range of reports of fairy encounters and reveals a consistency to the tales from both the Old and New Worlds.

However, it would be wrong to suggest that Janet Bord has been the first to approach accounts of supernatural experiences as more than mere folk lore. Back in the early 1970s, David Hufford carried out exceptionally thorough research into Newfoundlanders' beliefs about the 'Old Hag' and other specific types of nightmares; at this time the Canadian island of Newfoundland was isolated from both the Old and New Worlds by a combination of historical and geographical factors, and frequently-adverse weather.

At that time many Newfoundlanders were familiar with the Old Hag tradition and defined it as a dream 'where you feel as if someone is holding you down. You can do nothing only cry out. People believe that you will die if you are not awakened.' (Hufford 1982: 2). Hufford strenuously sifted such dreams from a variety of other nightmare experiences, including hypnagogic hallucinations and sleep paralysis, and concluded that 'being hag ridden' (as the experience was generally known as) was a distinct sleep experience for which the 'primary evidence' came from folk lore.

Hufford's work appeared in 1982 as *The terror that comes in the night* and convincingly showed that 'a significant proportion of traditional supernatural belief is associated with accurate observations interpreted rationally.' I am not suggesting that the Old Hag has any direct relationship to the other 'supernatural' experiences discussed in this article, but I draw attention to Hufford's work as it clearly shows that folk lore may contain accounts

of experiences which are otherwise ignored or denounced.

A different study of supernatural beliefs appeared a few years later, when Gillian Bennett's *Traditions of belief - Women and the supernatural* was published in 1987. By interviewing a number of women in north-west England about their beliefs in ghosts, the after-life, and such like, Bennett developed a technique for getting beyond the superficial remarks and making a more objective assessment of how literally (or not) individuals believed in specific ideas. Although Bennett's interviews touched upon ghosts, the real reason I draw attention to this work is because it shows that an individual's belief / disbelief is not just 'on' or 'off', but rather is more akin to part of a spectrum of belief on any one topic - and with complex inter-relationships of beliefs on more-or-less related topics.

Ghosts

Tush, tush. Their walking spirits are mere imaginary fables.

C. Tourneur

The Atheist's Tragedy iv, iii

As with fairies, ghosts have a history that goes back at least as far as classical Greece; indeed the oldest-known ghost story appears in the earliest 'book' - the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Most of the dead in ancient Greece, such as those who died in 'normal' conditions and had funeral ceremonies properly done on their behalf, were led by Hermes to cross the river Styx in Charon's boat and then pass into the realms of Hades. But some of the dead (such as those who died untimely or violent deaths, or where the funeral ceremonies were not properly performed) remained trapped between two worlds, and were attracted to the realm of Hekate. They roamed with her during the night and were to be seen at crossroads and near their graves. However, the

Greek word *phásma* or *phántasma* was a wider concept than our 'ghost', as the invisible demons associated with Hekate were called *phásmata* when they appeared in the visible world, as were also some liminal 'undead' beings such as Lamia (Gonzalez 1997).

As with fairies, ghosts and boggarts are known by a variety of names in the Anglo-Saxon era. 'In medieval England it was fully accepted that dead men might sometimes return to haunt the living' bluntly states Thomas (1971: 701), noting that the Catholic Church rationalised this belief by regarding such apparitions as the souls of those trapped in Purgatory. Early Protestant preachers treated the belief in ghosts as a Popish fraud. To ask someone in the sixteenth century whether or not they believed in ghosts was akin to asking if they believed in transubstantiation or the papal supremacy. Needless to say, this clear-cut theological issue became greatly diluted in subsequent centuries, suggesting that popular belief in ghosts was not easily passed off as a popish superstition.

We should not assume that previous generations believed in ghosts in the same way that modern day journalism still reports on 'haunted pubs' and the like. Ignoring the obvious 'marketing ploys', the nature of modern ghosts simply conforms too closely to a narrow range of 'idealised scripts', as Jeremy Harte recently showed convincingly for Civil War ghosts (Harte 1997b). David Taylor's article in this issue of *At the Edge* also reveals that haunted houses need to be approached quite differently from the assumptions of many 'ghost hunters'. Preliminary ideas on a 'social history' of ghosts were put forward a decade ago by Peter Rogerson (1987), who observed that 'The traditional Victorian haunted house was the short-lease house where the servants came with the property. The archetypal modern haunted house is the

council house. Such house literally "belong to someone else" . . . There is a greater likelihood of a failure of bonding between the occupant and the house.' David Taylor discusses this in more detail in his article elsewhere in this issue.

At this stage it perhaps enough to simply question the clichés of modern day ghost tales. One more question to ask in passing is to what extent ghosts overlap with experiences apparently missing from Protestant cultures but (as readers of *Fortean Times* will be well aware) still common enough in Catholic countries - to wit, visions of saints and the Virgin Mary. However, John Palmer (1998) has recently drawn attention to a chapel in Mortel, Holland, dedicated to Our Lady of the Wandering Lights which, on the face of it, suggests that there was a difference between a will o' the wisp and a vision of the BVM.

Earthlights

*'Search the Truth when,
down the dark lane,
Spirits glide and Blue Lights
gleam.'*

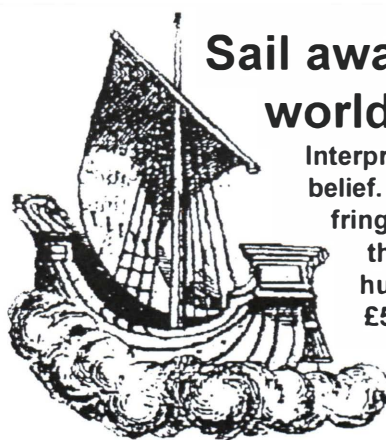
James Jennings
*Poems consisting of the
mysteries of the Mendips etc*
1810 (cited in Quinn 1997b).

There has been a previous attempt to link together various supernatural apparitions from ghosts through 'will o' the wisps'

to UFOs. This is Paul Devereux's 'earth lights hypothesis' which was first argued in 1982, with a major updates in 1989 and 1997 (Devereux 1982; 1989; 1997b; Devereux and Brookesmith 1997)

In bare outline, Devereux's earth lights hypothesis argues that tectonic strain in rocks - especially those near to active geological fault lines - can cause anomalous light phenomena. Such phenomena have been recreated under laboratory conditions and there has been sufficient evidence to support his suggestions. For instance, 'tadpole-shaped' lights were seen before an earthquake in Leicestershire on 11th February 1957, and anomalous lights appeared before the earthquake centred on Mounts Bay in Cornwall of 10th November 1996 (Devereux 1997a). According to a Japanese scientist, Yoshizo Kawaguchi (1996), many people reported seeing red and blue lights an hour or tens of minutes before the 1995 Kobe earthquake.

David Clarke's article in this issue of *At the Edge* provides evidence for both earth lights in the Pennines and also for a continuity with folk lore predating any of this theorising. A detailed study of folklore and anomalous lights around Bristol (Quinn 1997b) provides equally convincing independent data linking 'earth lights' with, in this case, both fairy and ghost lore.



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Illustration from Cicely Mary Barker's *Flower Fairies of the Summer* (Blackie, c.1920) - one of the author's own childhood 'encounters' with the modern fairy archetype.

Devereux also suggests that poltergeist activity and ghosts, especially the vague white shape types, are another manifestation of the same earth light phenomena. In *Places of Power* (1990: 32-4) Devereux provides clear evidence for links between fairy lore and anomalous lights in Ireland and Cornwall. He has also suggested that earth lights are capable of triggering temporary brain 'disfunctions' (such as temporal lobe dissociation), a topic to which I will now turn.

Elf-infested spaces

Professor Michael Persinger and his colleagues at Laurentian University in Canada have spent many years researching 'sensed presence' phenomena (otherwise termed 'ego-alien intrusions') from a neurophysiological perspective. In the search for brain correlates to the experience of 'presences', their studies have focused primarily on the deep temporal lobe structures of the brain, the amygdala and

hippocampus, which Persinger characterizes as the most electrically unstable structures in the human brain. By using electrodes to stimulate the temporal lobes, Persinger is able to induce a variety of deeply disturbing mental experiences (some readers may recall a BBC2 *Horizon* programme from 28th November 1994 when the Susan Blakemore interviewed Persinger and underwent temporal lobe stimulation). Such 'temporal lobe dissociation' generates strange visual and other sensations which the brain finds difficult to 'process' - subjects will often describe the sensations as being like someone pulling at their limbs, or even as a sequence of events which resemble aspects of so-called 'alien abduction' experiences. It seems reasonable to assume that the 'alien abduction' experiences (usually obtained by hypnotising the subject [1]) are 'invented' by the brain in a similar manner to the attempt to make sense of temporal lobe dissociation. A recent issue of *Fortean Times* (No.108) includes a useful overview of temporal lobe research and its relationship to anomalous experiences.

Devereux and Persinger have collaborated to explore the possibility that the anomalous energy seen as earthlights might have sufficient electrical energy to cause temporal lobe dissociation. Perhaps more relevant to this article is the recognition that many of the sensations induced by temporal lobe stimulation are akin to experiences with some types of psychoactive plants and drugs. According to Dr Horace Beach (1997), auditory hallucinations - closely resembling experiences generated in Persinger's experimental subjects - are a common experience with high doses of psilocybin ('magic mushrooms'). As many readers will be aware, magic mushrooms and some other psychoactives, such as DMT, also readily lead to visions of little people - not for nothing

has Terence McKenna (1992) described these imaginary worlds as 'elf-infested spaces'.

Other researchers have indicated that such experiences are cross-cultural. Julia Phillips (1998) reports that Australian Aborigines from New South Wales recognise traditional 'guardians of place' whose descriptions tally closely with her first-hand encounters with an 'archetypal' British elf or fairy in 'old' south Wales. Kevin Callahan at University of Minnesota claims Ojibwa Indians of the American Midwest see 'little people' for about thirty minutes during hallucinations induced by atrophine-containing plants from the Deadly Nightshade family. Callahan also notes that those in the second stage of alcohol withdrawal (i.e. two to three days after stopping drinking) report similar encounters with 'little people' (Callahan 1995).

More speculatively, Ralph Metzner (1994: 286) has suggested that the obscure Scandinavian Aesir goddess, Bil, was once regarded as a 'henbane fairy' - on the basis that the proto-Germanic word *bil* originally meant 'vision, hallucination' and there was a herb known to the Gaulish Celts as *Belinuntia*. The use of henbane was well known to Greek, early German and Anglo-Saxon writers; there is even evidence of henbane from bronze age urns found in the Alps (Graichen cited in Metzner 1994: 286). This may just mean that the rainbow bridge leading to Asgard, *Bilfrost*, may also have been originally linked to liminal visionary states.

Moving to modern times, I am intrigued that my grandmother, when in her early nineties and suffering from the combined effects of long-term crippling arthritis (she could not stand unaided by then), failing eyesight, and the relatively limited social stimulation of living in a old people's home where the fellow residents were almost all senile



(whereas my gran was not senile, although beginning to have slight problems with short-term memory) began to report seeing a 'little boy' who came into her room at various times - often at night, when he would curl up in a chair or at the foot of her bed. Needless to say, children were infrequent visitors to the home and none stayed overnight.

Taken together, there is a variety of evidence to suggest that 'elf-infested spaces' are more common than rational twentieth century thinking would normally accept. Could it be that, as with the Old Hag of Newfoundland, folk lore is providing us with direct evidence of subtle mental states which we are too quick to dismiss as pure fantasy?

Hollow hills and abductions

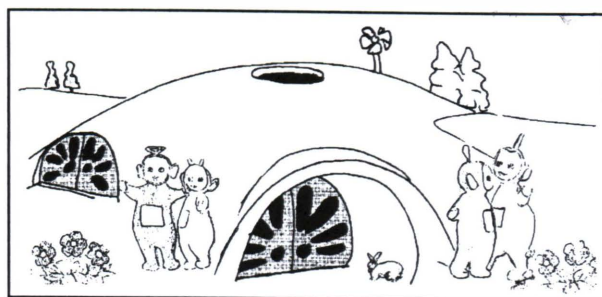
I explore this suggestion further I would like to delve into the contentious waters of 'close encounters' with aliens and alien spaceships. This is hardly a new suggestion - back in 1984 Ian Cresswell examined the subjective nature of 'close encounters' and their similarity to dream and trance states. Peter Rogerson (1988) picked up on similar themes four years later.

In issue five of *At the Edge*, Jeremy Harte (1997a) questioned the folk lore of hollow hills. Janet Bord (1997:

94-7) shows that the various tales of being 'abducted' to take part in fairy parties inside hollow hills have many similarities to the recent literature relating to 'alien abductions'. The curious similarities between hollow hills and the interiors of Spielberg-like space craft so suggest that the 'pre-technological' age experience is a close match for modern-day 'close encounters'. I cannot help but add that the Teletubbies also live in a hollow hill.

For similar reasons Phil Quinn's 'Toast to the recently departed fairy folk in the Bristol region' (1997a) concludes that 'it is not hard to wonder whether the fairies have in fact not left us but rather undergone a change in identity more in keeping with an eclectic modern world'. I would prefer to turn this around and suggest that certain 'altered states of consciousness' have for millennia regularly lead to visions of 'little people'; we now might prefer to 'justify' those imaginary experiences in terms of 'alien abductions' or even the neurological-speak of 'temporal lobe dissociation', but in previous centuries the same range of experiences were discussed in terms of fairies and a host of names relating to other diminutive beings - and were kept alive in the copious folklore.

The main articles in this



Sharing the same archetype!

Left: An early chapbook illustration shows what may be meant to be 'little people' dancing in a ring - note the prominent 'magic mushroom' and the door into what appears to be a hollow hill.

Above: Modern media has discovered the potency of strange 'little people' dancing - and living inside a hollow hill.

issue of *At the Edge* bring together different viewpoints from David Clarke, Jeremy Harte, Elizabeth Oakland and David Taylor. In differing ways they challenge many of the preconceptions which are all-too-easily linked to fairies, ghosts, anomalous lights - and even the nature of 'folklore' evidence. I hope you, the readers, will also recognise that the ideas which are being explored in these pages merely scratch the surface of these inter-related phenomena.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Jermeiy Harte for extensive comments on an earlier draft and for providing the discussion on medieval fairies.

The illustration on pages 4 is from the useful and informative WWW site for Fairy Lore and Literature: <http://faeryland.tamu-commerce.edu/~earendil/faeries/>

Note

1: It is beyond the scope of this article to dismiss the heavily-promoted claims for alien abductions. A steady series of articles in *Magonia* (Rottmeyer 1988; Ellis 1991; Rogerson 1990; 1994; Goss 1996; Rimmer 1997) have built



Illustration from Cicely Mary Barker's *Flower Fairies of the Summer* (Blackie, c.1920).

up a well-argued case for both 'alien abductions' and 'ritual abuse' allegations being the consequences of 'false memory syndrome' induced by what might be regarded as 'leading questions' asked under hypnosis. A summary of this work appeared in *Fortean Times* (Brookesmith 1996). In 1997 Kevin McLure launched a newsletter entitled *Abduction Watch* that deals specifically with 'the irrational muddle of faith and belief that typifies [alien] abductions'. A clear 'deconstruction' of a ostensible alien abduction is reported by Devereux and Brookesmith (1998).

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For those *At the Edge* readers who have not already obtained their copy of Jeremy Harte's bibliography *Research in Geomancy 1990-94*, here is a sample of what he has trawled up from the literature published between 1990 and 1994 relating to fairies and other entities.

The Puca haunts cliffs and holes, according to Deasun Breatnach, 'The Puca: A Multi-Functional Irish Supernatural Entity', *Folklore* 104 (1993) pp105-110. He will knock down a wall which stands in the way of his path; often he pushes a traveller to one side, out of the way of a dangerous invisible host. In Leinster he has become a household spirit of castles, but generally pucas are no longer seen. On the island of Naxos, however, the *exotika* - mermaids, vampires and demons - are still haunting lonely places. Charles Stewart went asking people about them for his *Demons And The Devil: Moral Imagination In Modern Greek Culture* (Princeton UP, 1991), but was amusingly nonplussed when the villagers decided that as a folklorist, he ought to know, and sought his advice about dealing with them. Nobody was supposed to believe in fairies in 1930s England, but they kept on appearing for all that and are chronicled by David Lazell, 'Modern Fairy Tales', *Fortean Times* 71 (1993) pp39-41. Usually they conformed to the iconography of popular literature, as on London's sacred tree, the Elfin Oak in Kensington Gardens (*FT* 71 p42). Belief and unbelief play tag throughout Joe Cooper's *The Case Of The Cottingley Fairies* (Hale, 1990), a study of photos faked by two Yorkshire lasses in a dawn session down by the beck. These fooled everyone, Cooper included, for seventy years, but after their confession was made the forgers still insisted that the fairies themselves had been real spirits of place. And still they come. *The Good People: New Essays In Fairylore*, edited by

Research in Geomancy 1990-94

Readings in Sacred Space

A bibliography compiled by Jeremy Harte

Peter Narvaez (Garland Publishing, 1991), has contemporary examples of phenomena such as fairy raths and pixy-leading: it identifies a liminal status in topography as well as culture for the fairies. Good to see that Robert Kirk's fairy hill at Balquidder is still haunted. Barbara Rieth develops the study of American pixy-leading in *Newfoundland Fairy Traditions: A Study In Narrative And Belief* (Institute of Social & Economic Research, 1991). Peter Rogerson, 'Fairyland's Hunters', *Magonia* 46 (1993) pp3-7, 47 (1993) pp4-8 finds that themes of amnesia, time-loss, lampless lights and seduction - common in fairy lore - have been incorporated into narratives of alien abduction which have evolved since the 1940s. Later developments include the prophetic status of abductees. The origin of the tradition lay in fears of kidnapping, but it has been transformed by the supernatural. Nigel Watson's *Portraits of Alien Encounters* (Valis Books, 1991) studies fringe ufo percipients of the late 70s including people whose visions of an alien presence

were rooted in particular local landscapes. There is a section on Paul Bennett's boyhood experiences in the West Riding. Nigel Mortimer, 'To Find A Hidden Site: Dowsing The Lost Circle Of Ilkley Moor', *Earth* 15 (1990) pp18-26 tells how a stone arrangement, thought to be a megalithic circle, was located by dowsing. Vibrating sensations were felt from the stones, and figures seen amongst them: anomalous low temperatures as well as dowsing responses were recorded. In 'The Call Of Backstones', *Gloucestershire Earth Mysteries* 18 (1994) pp26-28 he returns to this stone circle, noting how lights and entities were seen at the site and in the homes of those involved. Patrick Harpur sums up in *Daimonic Reality: A Field Guide To The Otherworld* (Viking, 1994). Traditional and modern entities, from fairies to phantom social workers, are treated in a unified theory of the World Soul and of shapeshifting daimons, an otherworldly correlative of Jung's theory of the unconscious. The geomancy of liminal sites is associated with entities.

Research in Geomancy 1990-1994 contains the fruits of a five-year trawl through the disciplines of archaeology, anthropology, folklore, social history and more. This bibliography provides an invaluable source for all interested in 'past and place'. *Research in Geomancy 1990-1994* is published on floppy disc for reading using any word processor (files are in Windows Write format and duplicated in plain ASCII). By using 'Find' specific topics can be readily located in the text.

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LOST IN FAERY

Wandering in the magical thorn thickets of the mind



If **you** had unintentionally wandered into Faery, got lost there, subsequently found the way out and wanted to provide some kind of guide for other travellers, where would **you** start? Such was my dilemma when I was asked to write this article. Would it be wiser to start with the folklore and disentangle the historical reality behind various fairy beliefs, or take a more modern and trendy approach and try to make a connection between Jungian psychology, modern 'reconstructionist' mystics, earthlights and 'ufo abduction' phenomena? It soon became clear that, whatever starting point I chose, all I could hope to achieve was an American-style, whistle-stop 'impressions of faery' tour, given the vast amount of material available on the subject. So I decided to take a very personal approach and see where my feet took me ...

It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive (probably at a hawthorn thicket, I rather suspect), so I went about my business for a few weeks, waiting for inspiration. Then, one day in Aberystwyth, I noticed a housing estate called, in Welsh, 'Afallon,' which had been translated (rather creatively, I thought) as 'Elysium.' This highlighted the question of whether it is possible to identify all otherworld locations as fairyland, and thus all otherworld beings (such as gods and monsters) as denizens of faery. Conversely, Robert Graves (1961) would have us believe that the case often cited as a classical faery encounter, Thomas of Ercildoune's journey into faery with the woman he hailed as the Virgin Mary and who called herself the 'Queene of Fair Elfland' (if we can believe the witness!) was really a witch queen and that he was in fact initiated

into an ancient cult. Clearly, there was wide scope for interpretation and I felt that the more wide-ranging the approach, the more satisfactory the resulting overview would be. Ironically, later the same day, my companions and I found a ram that had got his horns caught in . . . a hawthorn bush. Stand aside Thomas the Rhymer!

Synchronicity did indeed seem to be in favour of fairies, as the trend continued; an item on *Blue Peter* reported recent sightings. It was a surprise to find that, contrary to my preconceptions, 'ordinary people' are still seeing fairies! The story which most impressed me was about a mother and daughter who both saw a small, classic Victorian-style fairy in their garden. She danced on a stone briefly and then vanished into

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thin air. This is a lovely story to tell children, but what were the witnesses actually seeing? Current theory seems to favour the view that any unusual phenomena will be interpreted by the individual according to their own and the cultural psyche. A more esoteric view would be that the fairy takes the form we find easiest to interpret. The fairy the witnesses saw could also have been some kind of Jungian expression of their happy relationship. In other words, what they saw need not necessarily have had any independent existence at all. This provoked the reflection that, if we accept that we *can and should* doubt what we see with our own eyes, is there any material evidence that fairies are 'real'?

If we turn to photography in the hope that it will provide us with concrete evidence of fairies, we encounter the infamous Cottingley hoax associated with no less a figure than Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (a researcher into the paranormal who fell prey to the common trap of accepting evidence supporting his theories rather too readily). Only many years later did one of the 'girls', now

an old lady, reveal that the whole effect - including the appearance of motion - was achieved simply by cutting out some fairies from a picture book and sticking them on wire in the ground. However, one of the Cottingley girls also maintained until she died that she was trying to reproduce what she had actually seen, making it a sort of 'honest hoax'; it was obviously difficult to reveal the truth once so much attention had been attracted to the affair. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle does quote many other first-hand accounts of fairies in his book *The Coming of the Fairies*, all in line with the prevailing national perception (largely a medieval paradigm) of what pixies, fairies and leprechauns were. As for more modern fairy photographs, it should come as no real surprise that the fairies also mirror the appearance (or expectations?) of the humans. We can only conclude from this that the case is not proven and learn a few salutary lessons about fakery and self-delusion and move on . . .

While Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was collecting stories about the 'little people' from witnesses, the Theosophist view was that these small, so-called 'elementals' were part of Nature and played a vital, spiritual role in the process of photosynthesis. Interestingly, the Theosophists described them as being capable of taking on various forms, but that their essential nature was a glowing ball with a pinpoint of light at the centre. This sounds very like an earthlight. The only person I know to have seen one reported to me that it was about the size of a football and appeared to demonstrate intelligence i.e. it appeared one night and, when ignored, reappeared the following night and seemed to be trying to attract his attention. Fairy or earthlight? The 'Findhorn settlers' followed on in this tradition in the hippy era and their initial success (in the form of growing unfeasibly large



Janet Bord's book *Fairies* includes this photograph taken in 1976 of a naked female witch with two naked fairies.
Copyright S.I.N./Fortean Picture Library

vegetables) bore witness that, as usual, *there was something going on - but what was it?* Modern psychologists might be tempted to posit a theory along the lines that a shared belief (or group delusion) and the resulting faith that help was being offered by supernatural beings could have produced a group psychic effect, which in turn produced tangible results. This can be labelled the power of prayer or, indeed, magic. You pays your money and you takes your choice. Ultimately, if it works, it works. It is only our orderly human minds which seek to impose a structure on the intangible workings of the Great Unseen. I think.

To move on to some slightly more solid ground, Jenny Randles' comments about UFO /UAP ('Unidentified Aerial Phenomena') investigations at the 1997 Leyhunters' Moot spring to mind here: 'All experiences of the unknown are filtered through the perceptions and preconceptions of the witness': in other words, *'something is out there, but*

nothing else can be determined by visual / witness evidence alone.' In this vein, I make no excuses for my creative approach to the phenomenon we choose to label 'Faery'; this overview will, inevitably, be a product of my own particular perspective and experience, which according to your own perspective and experience, you may or may not consider balanced. Do we understand each other? Then come with me, and I shall show you many wondrous things . . .

Mystic portals to Faery

May we embark upon these wanderings in the realm 'faery' on the assumption that, for the purposes of a short article such as this, we can concur with the Welsh translator and agree that *any otherworld location*, in the British tradition at least, (Avalon, Elysium, fairyland, Annwn, the Fortunate Isles . . .) can be seen as an aspect of fairyland? The denizens of faery have always appeared to humans in many different guises

and there are as many ways open to us to approach their domain. I shall explore as many of them as I can in the space available, hoping to leave the reader with a good overview, and not lost in a thorn thicket! It so happens that Brian Froud and Alan Lee's picturebook on *Faeries* (Pan 1979) is on my bookshelf so I shall use that as the gateway to an otherworld full of creatures manifesting the national psyche in all its beauty and horror. A swift reconnaissance of the territory reveals the following: there are various beasts (e.g. kelpies, selkies) and phenomena (e.g. corpse candles) associated with the otherworld, and a variety of 'little people' (e.g. knockers, cobbolds, urisks, dwarves, undines . . .) but the underlying ideas of faery encounters are as follows:

1: faery folk are often attracted by / bring about human 'peak experiences,' and will often attempt to steal humans away to serve in Faery as lovers, musicians or poets.

2: Faery presents a dichotomy of threat to person coupled with benefits to be gained.

3: If treated with respect, the faeries will bestow gifts such as healing, prophecy and the creative arts. If these gifts are not valued or abused, they will be lost.

4: It is possible to escape from Faery, usually through being good and true-hearted, or the offices of a loved-one (e.g. Tam Lin). Sometimes the abductee returns home years or decades after disappearing into Faery (e.g. Rip Van Winkle). Others are happy to stay there.

The Shepherd of Myddfai

Welsh fairies (*y tylwyth tēg* - the fair people) also frequented our world, and even married mortals and had children. A classic example of this kind of story is the *Lady of Llyn y Fan*. It is a perfect example of the genre and I make no excuses

for quoting it at some length. A young man tending sheep sees a faery woman bathing in Llyn y Fan. He fails to tempt her with hard or unbaked bread, but, at the third attempt, he lures her closer and woos her. She agrees to marry him and goes to fetch her father, the King of Faery, from the city in the lake. The suitor has to distinguish her from her identical sisters to win her, and does so when she thrusts one foot forward to reveal a particular way she has of tying her shoe. He may marry her on condition that he does not:

variant 1: strike her unjustly three times

variant 2: expect her to go into a church, strike her with iron and ask her name.

They live happily together for many years, prosper and have many sons. Eventually, the husband taps her with a horseshoe, stirrup or other iron object to gently encourage her to fetch a horse so they can ride to a funeral. She laughs at the funeral 'because now the dead man is out of care' and is hit gently to shut her up. She cries at a wedding 'because now their troubles begin' and is hit again / the husband asks her name so he can curse her for disgracing him. Whichever variant or variants one encounters, the three blows / conditions come to pass and she has to return to the lake, very reluctantly in this case. However, she does return to this world to bestow the gift of healing on her sons, who become the famous *Physicians of Myddfai*, healers to the Welsh kings.

This story has it all; the threads are easy to disentangle for anyone vaguely conversant with folklore and psychology: the 'faery' woman might have been a woman from another / indigenous tribe whom the men of one / invading tribe viewed as being possessed of some magical powers. If an adventuring newcomer wanted a wife, perhaps the best way of obtaining one was by persuasion and where better to approach a prospective wife than when she

is bathing? The father in the story could be seen as showing some form of xenophobia in his requirements, but then again there is nothing wrong with a man having to prove himself either in feats of battle or intelligence and the suitor in question shows he has his wits about him by picking the right woman. As to the 'magical' obligation to return to her own people should her husband 'abuse' her, this can be explained by the importance in primitive society of truth-telling and keeping promises. Quite simply, both parties could no longer live together once certain promises had been broken. Alternatively, this could also be seen as a demonstration of how difficult it was for different peoples with different moralities to co-exist. The motif of iron is a common one (e.g. lucky horseshoes), whose origin is usually seen as lying in the conflict between tribes, some using bronze and others using iron; the former would have seen the latter as dangerous and invincible, the latter would have learned that their iron weapons 'warded off' the people they came to see as 'faeries.' We are left with the elements of the Lady's unusual perspective of mortality and the documented fact that members of the same family were gifted herbal physicians. If we dismiss the otherworld origin of these skills, it is easy to posit a feminist theory to the effect that the story was concocted to justify male usurpation of the healing arts in the sixteenth century. In short, it is possible to deconstruct it and all substance disappears like a will'o the wisp!

The Lady of the Lake

The Myddfai story appears to share its origins with the Arthurian 'Lady of the Lake' story. In this case, of course, the gift of a magic sword from faery, whose magic sheath safeguards its owner (Freudians, don't get too excited please!), which must be

returned to the lake upon the death / incapacity for office of the human owner. It is an established fact that the Celts and other similar tribes sacrificed treasure - not to mention people - to lakes / lake spirits and, by applying the 'archaeology of the sources' guidebook, it is not hard to identify the underlying idea that divine kingship was magically bestowed by a female faery figure (another gift, in other words). I shall refrain from describing in any detail the 'myth archaeology' angle (king symbolically marries Ban Sidhe / Gwraig Annwn = patriarchy allies with matriarchy), but I should like to point out that in druid practice, this mystical marriage could take the form of the king symbolically marrying / being reborn of a white mare, which was often then sacrificed and the king and / or druids feasted on its flesh / slept on its hide to 'travel to faeryland' to gain wisdom from the experience. This ties in with the rivers of blood through which the Queen of Elfland travels with Thomas the Rhymer, and the symbol of the white horse is immortalised in the western psyche in the depiction of conquering heroes e.g. King Arthur and William of Orange to name but two.

Entrances to the Entranced Land

This reference to the druids brings us to the boundaries between esoteric ground and Paul Devereux and Jenny Randles territory. Where, asks the enquiring mind, would one be expected to enter the land of Faery? Lakes are prime contenders, as are burial mounds (which invader / newcomers no doubt saw, at some stage of the proceedings, as mysterious 'homes' of 'little men' so small they could fit in pots! - I thank Ron Fletcher for this contribution) and standing stones and circles, not to mention hawthorn thickets . . . In other words, we are clearly

dealing with areas of 'earth power'; whether they are technically on 'spirit paths' or at 'nodes', these sites were used in the past as gateways to the otherworld, places where 'anoeth' ('not was', the timeless land) meets 'oeth' ('was', our reality). ('*Anoeth bid bet y arthur*', that much-quoted and furiously debated clue to the final resting place of Arthur becomes clear: Arthur has gone to faeryland, whence he came, at least in the mystical sense.) Here we also find earthlights, cases of 'pixilation' (now on the whole updated in the national psyche as encounters with aliens and space ships) and the phenomenon of special knowledge being imparted. Sometimes abductees feel threatened and think they have been subjected to operations or experiments. In films at least, abductees are returned home perhaps fifty years after their disappearance (the film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* springs to mind). The parallels are quite clear and do not need to be laboured; obviously, we are still in danger of being caught in the trap of viewing a phenomenon that has always existed through the eyes of our current culture, like our ancestors before us.

And here we are at the Jungian signpost! Shall we follow this path for a while? Of course, the lady (anima) with the gifts (insight, self-awareness, 'feminine' talents and attributes) naturally comes from the lake, a classic substitute for a mirror, the symbol of introspection. ('Psyche' = 'mirror'. In legend, sometimes the treasure the hero seeks is revealed to be - apparently - a mirror: i.e. he has found his true self during his quest.) 'She' returns whence she came if abused, of course. This Jungian path wanders along more or less parallel to the pleasant, middle path leading neither to heaven nor hell where R.J. Stewart acts as the guide; here, otherworldly figures are seen as supernatural beings from whom valuable

insight can be gained. They are sometimes encountered at significant sites but more often sought out by the use of creative visualisation (Matthews 1989; Stewart 1992). Similarly, Caitlin and John Matthews (1994) present these entities or archetypes as useful in meditation or they can be sought out as keepers of wisdom during shamanistic experiences. The central thicket we arrive at remains the same: great benefits can be gained from risky otherworldly encounters.

Blundering about in Faery

Here I must stress that I am not adept at this 'revivalist Celtic' technique, but certain cataclysmic personal experiences of a Celtic kind have taught me the virtue of the kind of structure which the Matthews and Mr Stewart *inter alia* provide. I imagine they would disapprove of how I blundered about in Faery to begin with, following my feet wherever my psyche led them. You see, when I started out on this road, I was ignorant of the Celtic spiritual revival, a logical human being who viewed all New-Ageyness with a mixture of bemusement and cynicism. That is why I feel qualified to report, as an independent witness, that *the Faery experience is powerful and can be overwhelming*. Where have I been? I have journeyed in the labyrinths, treacherous marshes and faery castles of my own mind, but I was sometimes most definitely not alone in there . . . the faeries / collective unconscious / spirit guides / ancestors ("The Them" as I affectionately call them) were in (?) / there with me. In fact, I was frightened at times until I realised that my Celtic heritage provided a system for understanding what I was experiencing. Have I returned from Faery with any gifts? I believe I have, and that they will speak for themselves. Have

I actually seen a faery yet? No.
 And I do not, unlike the
 Doubting Thomasina I used to
 be, need to see them to *know*
 they are there. Besides, you
 can't always believe what your
 only five of your senses tell you,
 right? But I promise to let you
 know if I ever do - and never
 forget that a promise is a
 solemn bond to a Celt like me
 . . . *Hwyl!*

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Asleep in the moonlight. A coloured wood engraving by Richard Doyle from the 1870 book *In Fairyland or Pictures from the Elf World*. Shown at the RAA Victorian Fairy Paintings exhibition.

Sex, drugs and circle dancing

An exhibition report by Jeremy Harte

Victorian Fairy Paintings, an exhibition held at the Royal Academy of Arts from November to February, acted as an introduction to a body of unusual paintings by some very odd people. Blinking in the unaccustomed sunlight afterwards, I found myself thinking how very *normal* the average hobgoblin is, compared to the slippery recesses of the Victorian mind.

It all starts with Shakespeare. Being part of the literary canon, the Bard was sacrosanct: and since *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* dealt with creatures of the imagination, they formed a pretext under which the wildest fantasy could be introduced onto canvases otherwise dedicated to antique figure drawing. The artists who repeatedly portrayed the meeting of Oberon and Titania were quite indifferent to any visual clues in the text; instead they explore a strange,

repressed convention by which the central figures are tall, graceful, classical nudes, while on the outskirts of the painting there are beings more grotesque and diminutive, who do violent and sexual things half-hidden under the leaves.

The erotic element is most conspicuous in the paintings by Joseph Noel Paton, which is odd as he was otherwise celebrated for portraits of Church of Scotland dignitaries. Instead we are taken to a densely populated undergrowth where, again and again, rough dark males overpower half-reluctant half-dressed females, while their friends peep delightedly at the whole business from behind a leaf. This kind of thing went down well with viewers of the utmost probity, including Lewis Carroll, who counted the fairies

in Paton's *Confrontation of Oberon and Titania* (169 in total) without any apparent anxiety as to what they were up to. It has to be said that, like most Victorian nudes, the female fairies are made of some unfleshly composition as smooth and white as marble, probably as impenetrable too. This may explain why they public could gaze happily uncorrupted on images like Simmons' gauzy soft-core *Titania*.

There is no sign of anxiety about drugs, either. John Anster Fitzgerald specialised in images of young ladies dreaming of encounters with young men, egged on by bizarre goblins, while a drained phial of laudanum rests by their pillow. Happy the artist who can depict alternative states of reality with so little unease - the more so because his freakish little

creatures are direct copies from the demonic grotesques of Hieronymus Bosch. Hell has been domesticated, and the artist makes it play pretty tricks around the fireside. His contemporaries called him 'Fairy' Fitzgerald - you could get away with that sort of thing then - and he created a parallel universe in which delicate elves make love, feast, hunt and sleep among brambles and birds' nests. There is even a *Fairies' Funeral*, with a corpse that is a dead ringer for the Santilli alien. Fitzgerald's weird hedgerow world suggests a subliminal revenge against the Ruskinian discipline of truth to nature; sometimes, as in *Ariel*, he begins by depicting a spray of hawthorn with meticulous realism and then throws everything to the winds by adding a wild-eyed spirit lying on the bark and carolling to a flock of impossible birds. Like all the other artists in this tradition, Fitzgerald lets his imagination play on the hidden daily life of fairyland - something quite different from the folk tradition, which is interested first and foremost in human encounters with fairies. Only Paton took notice of the old tales of his country, and this was because they could be seen through a double mask of distance, being both elfin and Celtic. *The Fairy Raid* shows a rather nervous changeling being carried off by medieval trooping fairies towards a mound where Druidical megaliths brood against the twilight. As a rule, the Victorian fairy paintings cannot make anything of folklore, because they want to celebrate escape from unpleasant aspects of life, not the irruption of another reality into it.

The exception to this is Richard Dadd, and even if we knew nothing of the background (Dadd killed his father in 1843 on the instructions of the god Osiris, and spent the rest of his life in mental hospitals) we could suspect it. Even the early, sane-period *A Fairy*, a rather pallid classical creature, is lit by

an ominous sunset: and works like *The Fairy Feller's Master Stroke* are troubling in both form and content. The picture is built up meticulously, obsessively, out of enamel-like layers of paint - nine year's work left it still unfinished. The characters seem blank or hostile, mostly indifferent to the main action. They are of varying shapes and sizes, some of ordinary human form, some giant insects, but there is no ordering principle among them, except that in the centre bodies and faces are distorted in a kind of vortex around a bearded head that looks as if it ought to be wise, but isn't. Here, and in *Confrontation: Oberon and Titania*, the idea of miniscule goings-on in the long grass is taken to extremes - the fairy queen and king are surrounded by little figures who act out their violent and passionate desires, and these in turn are surrounded by tinier figures, and so on in an infinite regress, down and down.

However, the Royal Academy are a cheery lot, and are anxious to provide lighter fare - book illustrations, theatre scenery for *Midsummer Nights*, and pin-up lithographs of the lead ballerina in *La Sylphide*. Dancing on *pointe* (tiptoe), that bewildering ballet convention, was originally intended to suggest supernatural flight. The epitome of cheeriness was provided by Richard 'Dicky' Doyle, whose two-dimensional compositions feature nonsensical little gnomes marching round and round in solemn procession. This, too, is a fairyland of escape from human concerns, although Doyle produced more subtle work; his *Wood-Elves Watching a Lady* are a set of gawky, leering louts, hiding behind a tree as the woman emerges on a woodland path, and uncertain what to do with her. The fairy image forms a privileged medium for thinking about class as well as sex.

Similar ideas lie behind Arthur Rackham's illustrations for *Peter Pan in Kensington*

Gardens, where the fairies are quintessential Edwardian ladies - even down to the billowing hairdos. They are gracefulness, refinement and snobbery in miniature, located in the genteel numinosity of the London parks. As the fairy paintings come closer to our own century, they rely more and more on associations with childhood, not just because the classic illustrated books provided a market for artists, but because children ('elves' in Victorian discourse) made up an alternative world. They were another fairyland, for which adults longed but from which they were inexorably disbarred. This kind of thinking is, naturally, pretty hard on real children; but then the whole tradition of Victorian fairy painting is hard on real fairies, too. One of the few pictures to suggest a way forward into the twentieth century - it seems to have slipped in by accident, having a winged female figure - is John Atkinson Grimshaw's *Iris*: more familiar, perhaps, as the cover picture of Janet Bord's *Fairies*. What makes this picture is not the so-so nude of the title, but the extraordinary unreproducible painting technique which indicates who she is, by surrounding her with the faintest traces of iridescent light. She is hovering above a pond, with the last sunshine of early evening striking through the trees and reflecting off the water. Grimshaw is a neglected genius (probably something to do with his coming from north of Watford). In this moment of light, loneliness and dark woods we are leaving Victorian fairyland and looking at something much more like the roots of neo-paganism.

For those who missed the exhibition, the Royal Academy published an *Introduction* with eight colour plates, and a full-scale (but still affordable) *Catalogue*. My thanks to John Billingsley, who prowled round with me and talked it all over until the small hours.

Do Elves have Rights?

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In the corner of the field, under a little wooden chamber, the waters of the fairies' well bubbled from the ground. 'It was a brilliantly sunny day in July. The corn in the field all about the monument glowed golden. A kind of ivy clung to the corner around one post, and had entwined itself into the matted thatch above, which sloped down and exposed the rickety roof-frame. It was a perfectly delightful sight in its rustic charm' (Cockin 1992). Here the villagers of Church Eaton had laid the foundations for their church, but at each night the busy labour of invisible hands moved the stones to the centre of the village. All that remains is the well - dedicated to St Edith, good for eye troubles, and having the strange property that tools left in its water will not rust.

But all was not well under the July sunshine. It had become clear that the weathered roof would soon fall in unless it was rethatched. The parish council would gladly pay a thatcher, but they have no money. Staffordshire county planning department have the money, but will not subsidise a project without public access. The farmer will set aside land for an access path, but at a price. This would be charged to the parish council - who haven't any money. Deadlock.

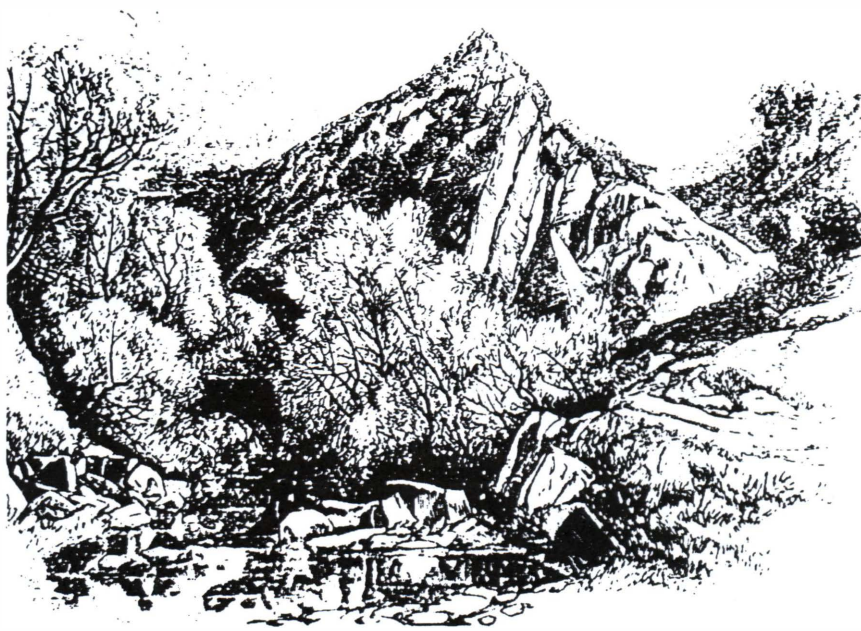
Evidently the fairies are getting a raw deal out of local government here. But sacred sites aren't always treated with such disregard. The County Engineer and Planning Officer for Devon, for instance, has called for proper respect to be shown to old stones by the public highway, recognising that they cannot be moved

without activating a curse. The Shebbear stone also falls within his brief - the one which has to be turned over every Bonfire Night, otherwise the Devil will wreak havoc in the neighbourhood (Clifford and King 1993: 60). No doubt the motives which lie behind his promotion of folk belief are not unconnected with tourism. What matters, though, is the public acknowledgement that supernatural issues are part of the responsibility of planning officers.

They certainly are in Iceland. A road scheme was poised for completion in the suburbs of Reykjavik, when it was noticed that the development would damage a hill known to be frequented by elves - so they redirected the road instead. Foreseeing that

this sort of problem would come round again, the city's highway authority briefed a clairvoyant. With her aid, developers can now draw on a land-use map specifying the places which are home to elves - and not just elves, but dwarfs, gnomes and huldufolk as well (Rickard 1994). Within a year the psychic contract was paying its way. Another road project had ground to a halt, since bulldozers seized up every time they tried to shift an elf stone. The highways section found another medium, and she mediated: the elves found a new home, the empty stone was respectfully transferred off site, and the road went ahead (Rickard 1996).

Maybe it is their marginal position in the European world-view which encourages small nations to take a positive attitude to other realities. The policies forged in Iceland have long been taken for granted in Ireland, where even international airports, symbol of integration into the global economy, are thoroughly subverted by tradition. Runways have been diverted to avoid causing damage to a fairy mound (Keel 1971: 227). Folklorists continue to relish 'the occasional news report that the course of a new road has had to be diverted to avoid cutting down a sacred tree' (Bord 1982: 105); usually the interests of the fairies are protected by the contractors themselves, men like Roy Green of Ballymagroarty who stopped



Crag-y-Dinas in Glamorgan, the kind of fairy hill that inspired Romantic sensibilities.

work when he came to a fairy thorn in 1968. Unable to find another developer willing to take on the risk, the planning department did the obvious and diverted the road (Bord 1997: 5). In case this seems like mere Irish eccentricity, there is the case from Emmer Green in stolid Oxfordshire, where housing development was halted when it reached the fairy tree under which two village girls left their teeth in exchange for presents. It is not clear whether the traditional status of the tree was any older than Naomi and Eloise (aged 7 and 9) but nevertheless its supernatural status won a right of appeal to the Secretary for the Environment, and launched a public enquiry (Collins 1985).

Someone, somewhere, is standing up for fairies. It isn't altogether true to say that 'missing from our modern practice of planning is the concept that there are forces beyond immediate secular forces and geological basics that bear on what is best done at each given site' (Swan 1991: 2). But last-minute campaigns in favour of elf-infested spaces are only token subversions of planning, a system whose core values remain anthropocentric.

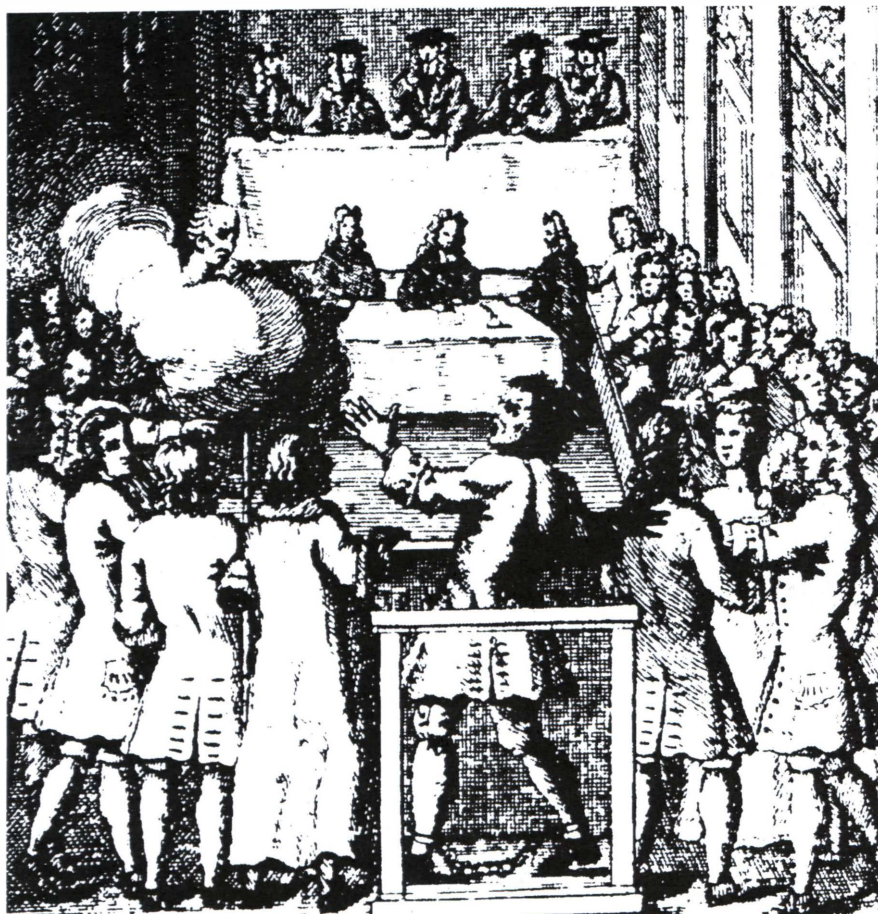
Back in 1944, when state planning was set to dominate the political process, a government White Paper laid down as its key principle that 'claims on land should be so harmonised as to ensure for the people of this country the greatest possible measure of individual well-being and national prosperity' (Cullingworth 1997: 22). It is 'the people' whose interests are paramount - not the Little People. And there is certainly no encouragement in government policy for the kind of planning in which 'the nerve centres of the earth . . . were guarded and sanctified by sacred buildings, themselves laid out as microcosms of the cosmic order, the universal body of God' (Michell 1969: 159).

In secular liberal states, it is the public interest, not the cosmic order, which has power to override decisions on road developments and housing estates. While it is possible that the spiritual form of sleeping Arthur was opposed to the Wychbury Bypass, the decision which overturned this scheme took no notice of the dead king's will: it respected only the interests and feelings of

ordinary people. This is the way that things are done in the West. But it is not the only way; the criteria which define who is a person are assembled very differently in other cultures. Naturally, this leads to trouble in court. In Australia, Aboriginal land claims have to be pursued through what is in origin a European legal system. Legal forms and ideas, evolved over centuries to determine questions of ownership, become absurd when they are required from claimants to whom 'land' and 'people' are not the objects and subjects of litigation, but a single community. Aborigines face the paradox that the real plaintiffs are not allowed in court. The stones and trees themselves, having sent the Dreamings which define tribal custom, are not deemed fit to plead: instead, the people upon whom they have exercised their rights have to speak on behalf of them. Anglo-Australian judges are often well-intentioned - but they simply cannot conceive that a rock might have something to say (Povinelli 1995).

In countries where the planning process has been explicitly set up for the benefit of human beings, it is easy to forget that religion makes claims so transcendent that human lives (let alone drains, parks and street lighting) are nothing in comparison. Even within the boundaries of Europe there are different approaches to this. Italy, with its thousands of underfunded historic churches, is reproached by the English because there are no plans for converting them to new uses (Sims 1995). Entrepreneurial Protestants do not see that a church which has fallen into sacred ruins is still a church. Turning it into a bistro destroys the building, whatever it does to preserve the architecture.

The secular state guards our most trivial worldly interests, while neglecting the great



A supernatural litigant makes an appearance in court, 1738.

questions of salvation - which is just as well. No-one wants to live in a theocracy. But by redefining the traditional bounds of the political to exclude God, the modern state has also abandoned its protection of the thousand creatures of the lesser mythology. Pagan law protected the *lares* and the *landvaettir*, while ours behaves as if they did not exist. So it is unlikely that planning consent would have been refused to the industrious farmer in the ballad who 'felled the oak, he felled the ash . . . He hewed him baulks and he hewed him beams / With eager toil and haste'. But the spirits of the wild saw it differently. 'Seven hundred elves came out the wood - / Horrible grim they were', and the farmer only survives by abandoning his utilitarian land-management strategy for a barrage of counter-magic. 'Spirits forced out of their abode by human

activity . . . will travel to another suitable place, but only after perpetrating some act of revenge against the culprits' (Pennick 1996: 26; 148). Clearly we should all be careful before we bulldoze that lonely old thorn. But is this just simple pragmatism, or are we prepared to extend the claims of our morality, our politics, to include the elf world?

Precisely because planning law is so extensive, it contains the seeds of its own contradiction. Landscape planning is based on the concept of amenity, an undefined compound of beauty, tranquillity and isolation given the status of law by the 1947 Town & Country Planning Act. For a hundred years before that, amenity had been the guiding principle of philanthropists who sought to offer to the teeming populations of Victorian slums a pure, elevating glimpse of nature. The

model to be imitated was the park or landed estate of the country house, with its trees and hills, glades and waterfalls - all reflecting the taste of the landed proprietor, just as the antiquities on the estate revealed his grasp of history. In the brave post-War future, the people of England would become a single, collective proprietor of the land, and its beauties were to be preserved for them. So, too, would its ancient monuments - even its folklore, if the wording of the 1979 Ancient Monuments Act is to be taken literally when it defines sites as 'of public interest by reason of historic, architectural, traditional, artistic or archaeological interest'.

In true anthropocentric style, the Act claims to preserve old stones and mounds only so that they can serve the public interest. But on the ground, it usually seems that archaeological sites are being protected for their own sake. The same is as true of Areas of Outstanding National Beauty, or Sites of Special Scientific Interest, as of Scheduled Ancient Monuments. Contemplating the resources which both the state and voluntary sectors plough into saving and keeping these places, it is hard to feel that they are being preserved for anything but themselves. Their survival is seen as self-evidently good. The National Trust would not have come into being if its founders had not shared a Wordsworthian sense that landscapes were places, not just of amenity, but of transfiguring spiritual power - places which called out for people to acknowledge and care for them. In conservation, and in the Green movement generally, the motives which really stir people into action are not always the same ones which they will advance in debate with the cynics. The legal machinery for preserving the environment relies on pragmatic values - thriftiness, aesthetics, science, history, and health. But what

really gets people going are the two unspoken motives - compassion and reverence (Ryder 1992: 4, 205). These are not anthropocentric. They imply a moral standing for nature in itself. The discourse of environmentalism, which began by extending the concept of rights from humans to (other) animals, has now come to touch on the ethical status of trees (Thomas 1982: 302).

Most people now behave as if animals had some kind of moral rights. Mutilating cats is wrong - it is wrong in itself, not because of any incidental loss it may cause to other people. But the law, slow off the mark, continues to affirm that animals can only be protected as pieces of human property. In exactly the same way, the law of sacred sites does not protect them



Claiming the fairy hill for science -
General Vallancey enters Newgrange.

How would you or I fare if the only thing that kept us from being destroyed for economic purposes was our potential use for amenity, tourism or education?

because they are worthy of reverence, but because they are part of the nation's property - its heritage. The Scottish guidelines on development, for instance, try to weigh economic interests against 'potential use for amenity, tourism and educational purposes' (Wood 1997: 16). How would you or I fare if the only thing that kept us from being destroyed for economic purposes was our potential use for amenity, tourism or education?

The survival of sacred sites is the thing that matters. Any law which achieves that end is better than one which permits destruction, even if it means that the fairy hill is physically

preserved by exorcising the last trace of respect for its real owners. But the trauma of denying the sacred is not easily healed, even in a country like Ireland where the old veneration survives alongside the new talk of heritage. The father leaves a rath uncultivated because it is fairy ground, the son because it is a scheduled monument. Newgrange, which was once the numinous abode of the *sidhe*, has now been reworked as an interpretative centre for celebrating the deep historical roots of the Irish nation (Ronayne 1997). This is not progress. What is so real about the Irish national interest, compared to Aengus Og and his hundred harpers?

Turning the haunted mound into a vehicle for imparting the National Curriculum is an abuse of the rights of elves. They have no redress in court, which is strange when you consider how well other incorporeal entities have their rights protected there. Limited companies can go to law over intellectual property - invisible beings fighting over an intangible thing - while Puck and Hob stand non-suited outside the door. This was not always the case. The Anglo-Saxons had no law of

corporations - a king did not give land to Chertsey Abbey or Wimborne Minster, as we imagine, but presented it directly to St. Peter or St. Cuthberga. At Rome, the heart of the administration, 'everyone believed that St. Peter was *there*, in a physical sense. He dominated all the activities of his see. His remains guarded his rights, and struck down those who tried to usurp them. In a way he was more real than the Pope, who was merely his vicar' (Johnson 1976: 168). Gifts to saints were not scanty. By 1259, when the Statute of Mortmain halted further acquisitions, a fifth of England's wealth was directly owned by supernatural beings.

In the end it was respect for saints which inhibited the direct exercise of their rights. As legal persons, they could both sue and be sued; but since no-one was so rash as to bring an action against a saint, their interests were defended by the monastic communities which surrounded them. Gradually the idea of the corporation as an imaginary being, represented by the actions of authorised people, came to substitute for the experience of saints as incorporeal beings speaking

What do we have Tree Preservation Orders for, if not to safeguard sacred groves?



The 'Hag Mountain' on South Harris. Drawing by Jill Smith, 1994.

through their living servants (Pollock and Maitland 1895: 1-499).

Clearly, therefore, supernatural beings can have a standing in law. Though courts have fought shy of accepting ghosts as litigants, judges have been careful not to deny their existence (Dennis 1997). The refusal to admit rights for the supernatural shows how much our legal framework is out of step with common perceptions of the numinous. In law, the field which contains the Rollright stones is freehold land, to be bought and sold. 'This is a strange concept', says John Attwood, spokesman for the real world. 'I don't believe that you can "own" a stone circle any more than you can own a cat. Apparently, though, the law says you can' (Attwood 1997). From the popular perspective, the stones have rights - or what comes to the same thing, the fairies which sneak out to dance around the King Stone on Midsummer Night have rights in that stone. At the very least they require that the stones be left undisturbed, and any human infringement of this right will be met by calamity - it is a standard motif in the folklore of ancient sites (Bord 1976: 191-210). Like terrorists everywhere, the elves are making sporadic attacks on people and property in order to assert rights which they are denied by the state. If they were given standing in the courts, they could defend their interests there, and not with elf-arrows whistling in the dark. There is no reason why the Seven

Hundred Elves could not have pressed their claims through the legitimate planning process. What do we have Tree Preservation Orders for, if not to safeguard sacred groves?

The controversy between those who accept that the supernatural has rights, and those who focus exclusively on the human, came to a head not long ago in the Hebrides. The backbone of the island of South Harris is West Stocklett Hill, the Hag Mountain, in the form of a giant woman reclining in sleep or death. The Hag has a guardian in the geomantic researcher Jill Smith - 'for me, the mountain is one of the ancient Dreamtime ancestors, the Grandmother who rose from the magma at Creation' (Smith, Billingsley and Dilworth 1996). In 1995 the work of Creation was revised; a hole was carved at the location of the Grandmother's navel by the artist Steve Dilworth, in order to set in a sculpture of his own. Not many people saw it in situ, but the installation was afterwards shown in a Stornoway art gallery. Smith doubled up in pain at the violation of the mountain. Dilworth was puzzled to encounter a negative response - 'I see it as a way of acknowledging our connection with the earth we stand on'. For Smith, the mountain is a person, and has rights. For Dilworth, the mountain is a canvas.

Hardly surprising, then, that the controversy should have flared up over a female figure. There was a time when a woman, like a cat or a stone

circle, had no legal personality. A man might violate her without committing an offence, unless he infringed the rights that some other man held in her. The difference between women and mountains is simply that the former have won the right to speak for themselves, while the latter are dependant on trustees or guardians - in this case Jill Smith, who is currently struggling to prevent Redlands Aggregates from further mutilation of the holy hill.

Supernatural beings have found some strange advocates. In the long-running controversy over the Elgin Marbles, commentators have forgotten that original title to the sculpture rested not with Lord Elgin, the British or the Greeks, but with the goddess Athene. Everyone, that is except Byron, who wrote *The Curse of Minerva*, an intemperate work in which the goddess, like a super-elf, curses Elgin and his race for the theft of her stones (Vrettos 1997). The status of the Marbles as heritage - and their anti-status now that the classical underpinnings of colonialism are out of fashion - have obscured their original meaning as sacred art, recreating throughout eternity the ritual of the Panathenaia. Even as they stood on the building, they had lost this value, since the Parthenon has spent most of its history as a place of worship for the Virgin Mary and not for the pagan maiden. To whom should they be restored? Athene has the prior claim, but a goddess without any worshippers has no-one to represent her

interests. Mary has millions of devotees worldwide, but presumably no further requirement for ancient Greek sculpture. Besides, at the time when they were stolen from her church, it lay in territory subject to Islamic law, under which the Mother of God had no supernatural validity either. The law reasonably requires that, in order to bring an action, the litigant must exist - and this would seem to be a rather grey area in the case of goddesses, let alone elves. If the principle of rights for the supernatural is accepted, we can look forward to some very odd debates in court. They will look more like solemn games than proper business. But then, as Huizinga pointed out in *Homo Ludens*, it is the really serious things that we play games about.

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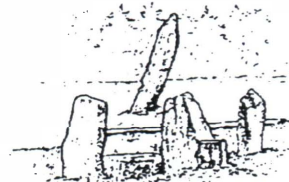
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Spaces of Transition

New light on the haunted house

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*'Your house is your larger body.
It grows in the sun and sleeps in the stillness of the night;
and it is not dreamless.'*

Kahlil Gibran *The Prophet*

What I hope to do in this article is question, as a 'ghost hunter', how we interpret ghosts and more specifically the 'haunted house'. I do not profess to have any answers, but hope to open up a subject that has remained on the fringes long enough. Respected psychical researcher A.D. Cornell is more than aware that we need to take a new look at ghosts and hauntings. At the 1997 Fortean Times UnConvention he said: 'You have got to put forward ideas, it's no good taking a safe line all the time in case you get criticised' (Cornell 1997).

For too long now most psychical researchers or, as the tabloid press still insists on calling us, 'Ghost Busters' have concentrated on the 'nuts and bolts' approach to hauntings, with the use of various pieces of recording equipment with, it must be said, very limited results. What has been overlooked in the past has been the cognitive aspects of hauntings, and that is because the haunted house still remains the domain of the amateur investigator, while the professional parapsychologists are more concerned with repeatable psychokinesis and extra-sensory perception experiments in their ivory towers, which is a shame because with their help we have a greater chance of reaching a better understanding of hauntings. The 'Ghost Hunters' also do not seem to be coming up with the

goods, as it were, tending instead to stick with the same old beliefs in 'spirits' or 'place memories'. As you will see from this issue of *At The Edge*, it is UFOlogists and folklorists who are opening new avenues of research.

Every community in every corner of the world has a 'haunted house', a building that has become a strong cultural icon both within our conscious and subconscious minds. Novelist and folklorist Andrew Lang observed that haunted houses 'have been familiar to man ever since he has owned a roof to cover his head' (Lang 1897). The haunted house as a traditional folklore narrative motif has long been recognised. If we look at the haunted house from a folklore/psychological angle we

can begin to see that it represents an arbitrary sign within the collective unconscious of the community. Its metonymy transforms the house, in the eyes of that community, into a modern representation, all be it in bricks and mortar, of a sin eater. It begins to take on and absorb the fears and concerns of that community. In extreme cases, where a violent murder has been committed in a house, that building may become derelict or, in the case of Cromwell Street, Gloucester, local and national feeling demands that all trace of the building should be destroyed, reinforcing I believe the very real and strong reactions and beliefs we have about houses. The possible act of cognitive dissonance applied to the local haunted house may also reinforce psychological theories about our feelings and views of ourselves and the world around us. But this belief, a form of internal projection, in effect brings about a communal re-creation of that internalised belief and may even externalise it.

Haunted houses - transferring tensions

As a psychical researcher I come into contact with many cases of haunted houses. The archetypal haunted house may very well be a council house, and indeed many are, but by the same token many are not. These cases are not confined to any one social class or structure

and there are common motifs in all these cases. One case which comes to mind concerned a family who lived in an affluent suburb of Birmingham. The recurring phenomena which they reported occurred at night, and involved the mother and daughter hearing footsteps walk across the patio at the rear of the house, then enter the house (no doors were heard to open) and then walk up the stairs and stop outside the teenage daughter's bedroom. Upon investigation no one was there. The family made discreet enquiries with the neighbours about the history of the house. They were told that no one ever stayed long there.

When I visited them it was clear that the present occupants believed that a past resident, who they believed had died in the house, was responsible for the phenomena. These occurrences, they believed, had apparently also been experienced by previous occupants of the house – with the result that no one ever stayed long in the property. An hour in the local records office soon showed that, despite what the neighbours had told them, a normal number of families had stayed in the house over a reasonable period of time and, even though past occupants may have died, there was no evidence to suggest that they had died in the house. This I feel illustrates the point: faced with apparently unexplained phenomena the family believe that the only explanation can be the 'spirit' of a past resident who died in the house. Their belief is reinforced by neighbours who appear to have 'invented' a history of the house.

Even when faced with such contradictions the family were convinced that a death must have taken place in the house. As Peter Rogerson has pointed out, 'To the new occupant, the "incomer", the haunted house has a "history" or a "reputation" in a personal, almost sexual way. The house is not a "virgin". It has been violated by the

presence of other human activity . . . ' (Rogerson 1987). And while we cannot say with any certainty that the family in question had any problems, certainly no more than 'normal' families anyway, their neighbours certainly seem to have projected their concerns onto the house. The house had become a sort of psychic scapegoat. We can then get entangled in a chicken and egg situation. Rumours that a house is haunted could lead the family to turn normal 'bumps' and 'bangs' into a tormented 'spirit', and before you know it the entire family is convinced the house, which prior to the rumours everyone was happy to live in, is haunted.

I investigated a similar case some time ago. Again the occupiers were concerned that someone had died in the house, and that their 'spirit' was responsible for the phenomena experienced. Despite the scientific research undertaken along with other members of Parasearch which strongly indicated that an electromagnetic phenomena was responsible for the experiences in the house, the occupiers still desperately believed that a supernatural explanation was more probable. This case also illustrates a very important, and an often overlooked aspect of hauntings. The family in question have since moved house, and now live in a small rural community. Both parents have since developed a healthy attitude to ghosts and are now both actively involved in various aspects of healing. After enduring what they have described as a living nightmare, the family has emerged stronger for it. Psychologist Julie Milton has also found similar cases which show that a more positive outlook on life and any possible life after death is also shared by some witnesses to the paranormal (Milton 1992).

An obvious motif that emerges in most cases is the apparent link between hauntings and poltergeists and

children going through puberty and family problems. As Gauld and Cornell have observed, 'The most common themes in the resultant diagnosis have been repressed aggression and tensions within the family . . . This consideration provides substantial evidence for the view that poltergeist phenomena not uncommonly express emotions and emotional conflicts denied access to the agent's ordinary stream of consciousness' (Gauld

Glossary

Arbitrary Sign: We know the meaning of a sign without considering other possibilities.

Cognitive dissonance: Theory that, when faced with contradictory information or viewpoints, the mind seeks out messages that confirm choices or verdicts previously reached.

Communal recreation: Urban legends that are changed in the re-telling.

Icon: A sign that, through frequent repetition, gains a central position in the communication systems of the culture and thereby acquires rich and relatively stable connotations.

Liminal: Derives from Latin, and means 'boundary' or 'threshold'.

Metonymy: The use of an object to represent the person or organisation which uses it.

Motif: A traditional narrative unit, such as character, object or action that serves as a building block of folk stories of all kinds.

Mythopoetic: Myth-making imagination.

Transcendent Function: Archetypal process that mediates opposites and enables a transition from one attitude or condition to another. It arises in an attempt to understand the elusive meaning of images. It has a healing effect by bridging consciousness and the unconsciousness.

Transference: Projecting emotions onto the environment or other people.

and Cornell 1979). These sentiments have been shared on the other side of the world by Brazilian researcher Andre Percia De Carvalho 'Apparent paranormal occurrences are always reported near the high points of crisis in a disturbed environment' (De Carvalho 1992). Although we do not as yet have enough data to make any concrete statements, I am at this point tempted to speculate, from various observations I have made, that along with these factors, we are also dealing with frustrated and suppressed creative tendencies, the frustrations from which, due to increased external and internal factors, can be projected onto the immediate environment.

The stress involved in a case, particularly a poltergeist, may also occasionally lead the witness to become 'actively' involved without being aware of it. Such an observation was made as long ago as 1938 by Dr Nandor Fodor. His most celebrated case involved a 35 year old housewife who he called Mrs Forbes who appeared to be at the centre of a poltergeist outbreak. Fodor soon came to suspect that Mrs Forbes was responsible for the poltergeist activity. The turning point came while they were out walking one day. Quite suddenly, and without warning, Mrs Forbes opened her handbag, took out a small stone and casually threw it over her shoulder. When Fodor questioned her about it afterwards, she indignantly denied having done such a thing. Significantly Mrs Forbes seems to have been at least half-aware of what she was doing. In the aftermath of the stone throwing incident she told Fodor 'Sometimes I feel that I am not here, that I am not really alive. It seems to me as if another person has taken control of my body . . . Last Monday my cat had an accident . . . I have a horrible feeling that I did it without knowing . . .' (Fodor 1958). It is difficult for those who have not lived in

a haunted house to appreciate the emotions and stress involved, so is it any wonder that the witness finds it easier to believe that 'spirits' are involved rather than something much more closer to home.

But we should not be surprised at these deeply rooted beliefs in the haunted house and spirits. In the ancient world it was a common belief that every dwelling had its own spirit or *genius loci* that was honoured and respected. Neglecting to honour and make offerings to these guardian spirits of the home would almost certainly result in havoc breaking loose. What we would today classify as poltergeist activity was in the past often attributed to the fairies (Bord 1997). Today we consider ourselves far too civilised to believe in fairies and goblins, but the belief in spirits is obviously far too deeply rooted. So far I have yet to come across a case where the occupiers thought that their house was haunted by an elemental spirit.

Haunted houses - universal symbols

The acquisition of a house has become a symbol of power, and an important rite of passage in our culture. It shows we are ready to stand on our own two feet and face the world and its responsibilities. The acquisition of land has always been a potent image often relating to supernatural powers and feats of strength, whether it be through the traditions of carrying fire round the perimeter of the land or the well known ox hide myths. Peter Rogerson may be right when he says that the council house is today's archetypal haunted house, and offers a tantalising explanation that this is due to a lack of bonding between occupier and the property simply because as a council house it belongs to someone else. Maybe our houses are haunted because we have lost touch with them, not

in a physical sense, but in a deep spiritual sense. Author and researcher Nigel Pennick has suggested: 'The personality of a house, expressed by its name is denied by numbering. It is reduced to an object, defined only in terms of its relationship, spatial or otherwise, to other objects classified similarly. Its character is no longer recognised' (Pennick 1993). This interaction between memory, emotion and home has been explored by the artist Pam Skelton 'We construct a sense of who we are, what our identity is, through our recollections of places and people - ghosts and symbols from the past which haunt us both in the present and the future' (Skelton 1990). You only have to look at reports of recent legal battles between once friendly neighbours over boundary disputes to see how entrenched these feelings are.

This interaction is not only confined to our perception of the house but to how we perceive ghosts. As Bob Trubshaw has outlined elsewhere in this issue, our attitudes to ghosts, from classical Greece to Victorian England means that to each generation ghosts appear for a variety of reasons and purposes. An audience in classical Greece, familiar with vengeful spirits would scarcely comprehend the 'Grey Lady' as she flits through Victorian graveyards (Finucane 1982). Our own sensibilities and constraints of the Victorians have not only silenced us but our ghosts as well. Death within popular Western culture is seen as a contamination. Our denial of death reached a peak with the Victorian era. But within Indo-European creation mythologies the act of death inevitably leads to life. The sacrifice of the primordial god leads to the formation of the world (Stone 1996). Even today anthropologists have documented tribal cultures that believe that the ancestors have power over the living and can endow it with fertility (Children and Nash 1997). In traditional

cultures, the cosmos, temple, house and human body are all linked (Trubshaw 1997). This means that we are intrinsically linked in a supernatural relationship with the land that the house is built on.

From the annals of folklore an intriguing aspect of this symbiotic relationship between death and houses can be glimpsed in the customs and superstitions still centred around screaming skulls. These are either actual human skulls or carved stone heads which have been kept in a property or passed down through the family, and which occupy a specific place in the house. Removal of these 'skulls' often leads to screaming and other poltergeist type activity until the 'skull' is returned (Clarke and Roberts 1996). The location of these 'skulls' and other ritual artefacts, in geomantic weak spots, such as windows, over doors and chimneys is said to keep away unwanted ghosts (Lloyd 1997). So here we glimpse archaic vestiges between house, spirits and death, traditions which, even though greatly diluted, are still an important and deep rooted aspect of modern culture in the form of those who believe their house is haunted. How many people do you know whose attitude would change if you told them that a person had died in the chair which they were sitting in or the bed in which they slept? That chair or bed suddenly takes on a new meaning. It is viewed differently. It is still a chair or a bed, but it has now taken on a liminal quality, it has a symbiotic link between the living and the dead. And as we have seen, in extreme cases such as Cromwell Street, that relationship cannot be tolerated.

As we can see from any good ghost story, ghosts are always perceived to occupy liminal areas, such as crossroads, graveyards, moor land, and, as we have already seen, liminal objects are associated with death (Trubshaw 1995). I am

also intrigued by the many reports I have come across and the observations I have made, where ghostly apparitions/presences have been encountered on everyday liminal thresholds such as doorways. Some of these experiences may be deeply rooted in Neolithic superstitions about doorways and death (Children and Nash 1998). Once again as Peter Rogerson has perceptively pointed out 'Ghosts, haunts and polts then are the signs of the Liminal zones between being and not being' (Rogerson 1987).

Haunted houses - dreaming the sacred

The developments between consciousness research and 'earth mysteries' has led to 'Project Interface', the latest phase of the Dragon Project, which was established in the 1970s to research so-called 'earth energies' at ancient sites. This new phase has centred around volunteers sleeping and dreaming at selected ancient sites to see if any transpersonal, site specific motifs will emerge which can shed new light on these sites (Devereaux 1994). Now this raises an interesting point. By the simple act of defining some areas as 'sacred sites' what we are in fact doing is saying that some sites are not 'sacred', we are taking the sacredness away from the land and our lives (Trubshaw 1991). What makes some locations any more sacred than another is not the primary concern here. However it is an interesting possibility that the research by Paul Devereux suggests strong correlations between stone circles and geological faulting (Devereux 1982) may be applicable to cases of hauntings. Dr Michael Persinger has also done a great deal of work linking geomagnetism, altered states of consciousness and anomalous phenomena (Persinger and Lafreniere 1977), and we must not overlook the influence of man

made electromagnetic fields on the human mind (Budden 1994; 1995).

If the work of Project Interface tells us anything about sacred sites, could this research be applied to the study of haunted houses? One of the underdeveloped areas of parapsychological research is the interaction of human consciousness at haunted locations. Writing in the 1920s Jung made a pertinent observation: 'One of the most important sources of the primitive belief in spirits is dreams' (Jung 1982).

I ask this question simply because a few months ago I came across the following case of a haunting, in which one of the witnesses was having vivid dreams, dreams which only occurred in the house, never while she was away. In the dream the dreamer is woken by a knock at the front door. She opens it, and is greeted by her recently dead brother who was killed in a car crash. He tells her that he was 'hoovered up' after the accident, taken to the top of a tall tree, put back together again, and has come to give her a message. A strange aspect of this already strange dream is the fact that the dead brother has no skeletal structure. The dream ends when he opens his eyes, revealing nothing but blackness, at which point the dreamer screams and wakes up.

If we look beyond the obvious personal and emotional aspects of this dream we can begin to possibly glimpse some transpersonal details with strong shamanistic elements. The being taken up to a (world) tree, the putting back together, the supernormal powers (no skeletal structure), and a message for the living, are all apparent in shamanic practices (Kelly 1996 and Eliade 1989). But this is just a dream, and so tends to get over looked by most psychical researchers, which is a shame, because I have a hunch that here is the key to unlock a Pandora's box of answers. Jung had similar

Should any readers wish to discuss any ideas here or report a 'haunting', in complete confidence, then they can contact the author on 01384 296445 (evenings only).

thoughts: '... the primitive speaks of spirits, the European speaks of dreams ... I am convinced that if a European had to go through the same exercises and ceremonies which the medicine man performs in order to make the spirits visible, he would have the same experiences. He would interpret them differently, of course, and devalue them ...' (Jung 1982).

Maybe in cases of haunted houses we can glimpse the emergence of a much neglected strand of shamanistic experience. After all, if we placed these experiences within any other context than a modern Western one, dreams and visions of 'spirits' was the domain of the shaman. If this dream had occurred at a stone circle, burial chamber or holy well we would all be jumping up and down, excited and expectant at what it would tell us about our relationship with sacred sites. But this dream occurred in a council house in a suburb of Birmingham, and as we all know, these are not sacred sites ... are they?

Haunted houses - healing the haunted

Haunted houses certainly have a lot to tell us. H.H. Price, Professor of Logic at Oxford University and past President of the Society for Psychical Research, seems to have been aware that when investigating ghosts and hauntings we are faced with a dual problem: '... neither mental or physical, but betwixt and between' (Price 1953-6). Very few cases show any evidence of direct, conscious hoaxing. The majority

of cases are reported by genuine people who are struggling to come to terms with what they have experienced. They are more often than not scared by these experiences and are confused and a little embarrassed at talking about them. It is up to psychical researchers, psychologists and folklorists to help people in this situation to come to terms with their experiences. It is certainly tempting to engage in what Jung would have called the Transcendent Function in cases of hauntings in an attempt to bridge the conscious and the unconscious minds with the 'spirit of place' of the house through its mythopoetic projections in an act of self healing. Whether we realise it or not, myth has a key role to play in unravelling the enigma of the haunted house. 'Myths recount the actual workings of the supernatural, and because they do so, whenever they are retold or re-enacted, they are deemed to release or set in operation that supernatural activity ... Myth preserves a sense of the sacred. If a society has no use for the sacred it will probably have no use for myth either, except perhaps as a euphemistic term for indicating what it takes to be a lie' (Sykes 1993).

As I stated at the start of this article, this is in no way intended as a cohesive argument for a well-packaged theory, but rather the musings of one ghost hunter who - after countless long cold nights in haunted castles, pubs, factories, manor houses, council and private houses - feels that it is about time we made a move and followed the suggestion of A.D. Cornell quoted at the beginning of this article, and put forward new ideas. Most paranormal investigators will resist this, but that is no surprise for new ideas are seldom liked or encouraged.

When investigating ghost/haunting experiences we have to remember that we are dealing with *human* experiences. We have in the

past I feel, overlooked the human element in all this in favour of the apparent non-human. There is certainly a lot to be said for physical readings and measurements with scientific equipment in cases of hauntings, and I would be the first to champion that line of research, but also we have to be careful that we do not neglect the other, more cognitive aspects of these cases and what they may tell us about the world around us and more importantly, about ourselves.

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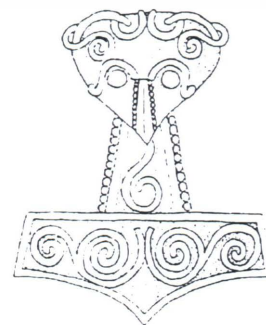
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Peakland Spooklights

DAVID CLARKE is a full-time journalist with The Star, Sheffield's evening paper. He has written five books on folklore and the paranormal and is currently completing his PhD in British Folklore at Sheffield University.

*Compact of unctuous vapour, which the night
Condenses, and the cold environs round
Kindled through agitation to a flame,
Which oft, they say, some evil spirit attends,
Hovering and blazing with delusive light,
Misleads th'amaz'd night-wanderer from his way,
To bogs and mires, and oft through pond or pool,
There swallow'd up and lost, from succour far . . .*

John Milton *Paradise Lost*

Strange lights in the sky hovering over rocky crags, dancing over wooded valleys, playing tag with each other, leading walkers astray. Ghostly rays and beams, will o'the wisp or 'foolish fire' in British folklore, have become transformed into Unidentified Flying Objects or Flying Saucers as the Industrial Revolution moves into the space age. Phil Reeder (1986) notes that accounts of will o'the wisp in scientific and popular literature were common towards the end of the last century, but these have decreased at the same time reports of UFOs have increased!

The appearance of mysterious lights above marshland gave scientists a ready explanation during the age of reason. Methane and other marsh gases, they said, created by rotting vegetable and animal matter bubbling up through the bogs, when ignited could produce wispy flames and balls of fire which flit about and, when carried by air currents, startle unsuspecting rustics. Newton connected marsh gas with the *ignis fatuus* in 1730, and the theory held good for a number of centuries. In 1980 Dr Alan Mills at Leicester University's Department of Geology decided to scrutinise the evidence and found it wanting (Mills 1980). Using laboratory

conditions he consistently failed to reproduce a will o'the wisp type flame using methane, phosphene and other substances suspected as contributors to the chemical soup in marshland. What is more, he could not find any other natural spark which could ignite gasses produced from rotting vegetable matter. Whatever the will o'the wisp was, he concluded, it was not a product of marsh and their gas. And he also ruled out other natural electrical phenomena, like St Elmo's fire, ball lightning and luminous insects as having any part in the production of the phenomenon.

Few of the reports of spooklights I have collected, especially those from the Peak District, come from marshy areas but rather from mountains and rocky gritstone uplands. The rapid, playful movements of the lights which people see, and their longevity, suggest they are possessed of some kind of low order intelligence, or react to subtle changes in the air, magnetic field or environment which are not obvious to the human observer. In folklore the will o'the wisp often appears as mischievous fairy or evil spirit who misleads travellers from their safe paths into treacherous bogs, a motif well known on Dartmoor where persons who become victims of the lights are said to have been 'pixie-led'. Turner, writing in 1901, described a region of marshland near Longnor in the upper part of the River Dove, where at twilight 'there is a flickering light to be seen moving as one moves . . . it has given rise to many tales of belated travellers having been beguiled by it and led into the swamp, where their bodies remain, and from whence their "boggarts" arise at night to caper and dance all over the countryside, to the terror of the inhabitants.'

The Earthlights Theory

Methane exiting from the surface of the marsh would be expected to burn, if ignited, as a flickering, fixed flame, but would hardly move through the air or against a prevailing wind. The marsh gas explanation for spooklights has been superseded by others, some fanciful and

others plausible. Popular at the moment is the 'earthlights' theory which is a convincing connection between lights and the faulted geology of the regions in which they appear. Although no clear production mechanism has yet been discovered which scientists are entirely happy with, the theory suggests the lights are the product of a build up of electrical charge in areas of geological stress. Rather than being directly caused by earthquakes or tremors, the lights are symptoms of the earth's internal traumas, springing into life as electrons are slowly released into the air and possibly through the water table as strain waxes and wanes in zones of geological faulting. (Brookesmith and Devereux 1997)

Well-known spooklights

Explanations have come and gone, but the lights remain with us. Attached to particular places in the landscape, they appear and disappear and have become so well known that folklore gives them their own names, or places they are seen regularly are named in their honour. In the High Peak of Derbyshire, there are the well-known Longdendale Lights, better known as the Devil's Bonfires to residents of the valley. Some believe their appearances over the centuries gave rise to the name Shining Clough, one of the craggy mountain ridges where they love to frolic. Then there is a hill known as the Lantern Pike, ten miles to the south-west above the village of Hayfield.

Peggy wi'th' Lantern was a frequent visitor here, say the old tales, swinging her lamp on the summit of the hill on dark nights. Another light gave its name to Meg o'th' Lantern Lane, shown on an old tithe map to the south side of the River Derwent near Derby [1].

The traditional explanation, and one I have met with wherever I go in the countryside, is the lights are spirits. Whether they be mischievous sprites bent on leading travellers astray, fairies, genius locii or elementals who live in the sky, like the Gaelic Sluagh - that is how the old tradition sees them. A parallel motif is the light or lights as omens of death or disaster, a strong belief in Ireland, Scotland and Wales where the corpse candle tradition features prominently in folk tradition. Liz Linahan (1995) records a story of this genre from Whitwell in Derbyshire, where the appearance of a 'fairy death lantern' guides a man lost in the blizzard of 1947 to safety of the cottage where his elderly mother lies dying.

A number of similar stories are found from the caverns and mines of the Peak District and the neighbouring South Yorkshire and North Nottinghamshire coalfield. Here much neglected mining folklore is rich with accounts of lights in pit tunnels which warn of impending disaster, or lights which haunt mines where disasters have claimed lives (Linahan 1994: 81). Much of this shades into ghostlore, where the lights become the ghostly lamps on miners' helmets, or in the case of the Longdendale Lights on Bleaklow

they are the burning torches carried by Roman soldiers who tramp across the moor every year on the night of the first full moon in spring. On the Staffordshire moors, a dim blue light is said to haunt a hillside near Rushton where the ghost of a murdered woman was laid by traditional methods (Clarke 1991: 65)

Another mining tradition is the 'fiery drake', an eerie ball of flame known to lead miners in the Peak. The appearance of this light was said to lead miners to the richest ores, a tradition which suggests links with West Country mining traditions recorded by Paul Devereux. In the Peak District lights are known to frequent stone circles, burial mounds, rivers, caves and rocky crags. Wayne Anthony Boylan (1997) mentions lights seen around Outcrops at Lunter Rocks, above Winster, in the White Peak, and at Harborough Rocks near Brassington, and Liz Linahan (1995: 85) mentions a 'fairy tree' on Whitwell Moor, where lights are seen to gather.

There are also lights reported on Stanton Moor, and around the Neolithic megaliths of the Bridestones, a burial chamber, near Congleton (Doug Pickford, pers. comm.). Coincidentally, both of these locations are locations where UFO 'abduction' events allegedly occurred, which involve the manifestation of light phenomena before a mystical vision (Pickford 1994: 99-102). Then there are the lights which dance on barrows. Caudon Low, a notorious fairy haunt in the Staffordshire Moorlands is certainly one of these, but there are others in Monsal Dale, the

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Weaver Hills, and Chris Fletcher (1993) mentions another spotlight which follows a path between a burial mound called Saxons Lowe near Tittensor and a farm in the same county. Writer Alan Garner, drawing on traditional lore from his Alderley Edge home, mentions another barrow haunted by lights on the Cheshire side of the Peak in his 1968 novel *The Moon of Gomrath*.

All these motifs neatly fit both the earthlight and spirit theories, as we can surmise that ancient man saw these phenomena too and could have built shrines or holy places to honour the earth spirit which manifested as a ghostly light. Wayne Anthony (1997) mentions a local sighting of a strange blue light which emerged from nearby woods and hovered above the Nine Stones Close circle on Harthill Moor. A nineteenth century writer described the circle as a place where local fairies were known to dance and 'hold high jubilee'. And we know similar accounts are on record from elsewhere including one good eyewitness report from 1919 of lights hovering within the Castlerigg Stone Circle in Cumbria (Devereux 1989: 77-8).

Dovedale double

Although ghostlights figure strongly in folklore motifs, there are many interesting contemporary eyewitness accounts of their activities. Some of them come from people who see lights in a notorious area haunted by these phenomena but are unaware that others have seen lights there before. A young man called Oliver Rowlands contacted me back in 1994 to describe his encounters with lights which haunt the beautiful limestone valley of the River Dove at Dovedale in the White Peak. At the time he was unaware of Turner's account and those of others I have collected from this area. Thousands of people visit this Staffordshire beauty spot during the summer to walk along the river, cross the stepping stones and scale Thorpe Cloud which towers above the valley. But how many are there after dark when, according to Mr Rowlands, strange lights dance above the river?

According to the account, the initial experience took place in March 1993 when Oliver was a final year student at Derby University, and living in

Ecclesall, Staffordshire. One night, accompanied by a friend called Steve Ashall, he decided to go for a late night drive into the Derbyshire peaks after college. Stopping the car in the carpark at Dovedale they went for a walk by the river towards the well-known Stepping Stones. As they got closer to these stones, two 'very bright white lights' caught their attention. Both approximately the same size, they were perfectly round and lit up the surrounding area although they threw no beam at all. Making no noise, they danced in perfect symmetry, both following the other or one moving right as the other moved left. The pair estimated they were between 10 and 100 feet above the river and about double the width of the river away from them.

'They were moving up and down in crazy patterns far too quickly for them to be the lights of a motorbike; anyway, there would be no chance of a vehicle of any type moving up and down the cliff so quickly or with such turns of speed,' explained Oliver. 'The experience, which lasted about three minutes, left us speechless. Then we started talking and questioned what it could be. There was something quite eerie about it. We eventually decided to turn towards the car again, and we too frightened to look back, but just kept walking and eventually broke into a run.'

The following day the pair met with ridicule when they told family and friends at college. But in September that year, Oliver returned with another college friend called Dean Atkins to the valley, this time at 7pm, just after darkness had fallen. They walked two miles past the Stepping Stones, climbed a hill beyond a chain of limestone caves and sat watching the valley from a point high above the river valley. 'To be honest, I thought that to see such an occurrence once would seem a miracle, but twice?', he writes. 'But sure enough, one light (much larger than the previous one) made its

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appearance from trees to our left, looking back along the river, towards the car park. It seemed to rise, and wobble along before disappearing into the trees. This was below us and again we heard no sound. Later we saw another light, whilst on foot heading back towards the car. Again, it was a large sphere of light, white in appearance.'

At the end of his account, Oliver asks: 'Can rivers or water emit strange gasses? And if so how can they dance and chase each other in perfect symmetry at speed. Are they ghosts or spirits? I don't know, but if I could film them then perhaps the peculiar pattern to their dance can be unravelled to reveal some particular meaning, code or language. . .'

Longdendale Lights

Like the luminous phantoms which haunt the river Dove, the Longdendale Lights have been around for countless centuries and the darn things just won't go away. Teacher and musician Sean Wood lives in an isolated grey stone building whose lounge window fronts directly onto the carriageway of the busy trans-Pennine Woodhead pass high up in the Dark Peak of north Derbyshire. The stark forbidding gritstone north face of Bleaklow - which faces his home to the south - are where Sean and his family have seen pulsating blobs of light which cavort above the fells.

'Quite simply, there are bright lights which appear at the top end of Longdendale - there's no doubt they exist but what they are I just have no idea,' he told me. He was pointing towards Shining Clough, a rugged desolate mountain ridge which at nearly 2,000 feet above sea level dominates the southern horizon outside his home at the head of the valley. Sean and his family first saw the lights there in 1982, the year he moved to aptly-named Bleak House.

'It was about 9.30 on a November evening, when I

walked into one of the front rooms at Bleak House to chastise someone for shining a torch through our window,' Sean explained. 'Of course there was no torch, nor indeed any person outside. However, the light filled the room with a chilly, moonlike glow. 'The effect was heightened by the lack of street lighting at this altitude and when I went outside to investigate I saw a large pulsating ball of light directly above the house, and not too far from the aptly named Shining Clough. With the hair on the back of my neck bristling I went to telephone my near neighbours at the Crowden Youth Hostel. Guess what? They were outside watching the light in the sky too.'

This was just the first in a long series of unexplained luminous interludes which have plagued valley residents for as long as memory can stretch. 'Two years after that I saw it again, beneath the skyline. In all I've seen them more than 30 times over the 16 years I have been living here,' said Sean. 'One of the times it was very very big, and between 50 and 70ft from the ridge, it was pulsing again and then stopping, moving back and forth and up and down. I've also seen three lights together, much smaller and together, like in a string, moving in an arch. I've seen these a few times, and the big ones a few times. There's no doubt about the fact there are lights out there on those moors.'

Sean Wood is just one of dozens of Longdendale residents who have experienced the phantom lights which haunt Bleaklow mountain and the Woodhead pass which runs below it. Jean Whitehead, the previous owner of Bleak House, saw similar lights hovering over the mountains and reservoirs. Nearly everyone who has lived in the upper part of the valley has either seen or knows someone who has seen them. The lights are just one strand of a rich tapestry of stories and legends associated with Bleaklow - a dark, high rocky

plateau covered by a thick layer of peat and heather. The lights are so well-known they have become part of the folklore of the region, just another aspect of the 'Otherness' of the valley (see also Clarke and Roberts 1996).

The Devil's Bonfires

Stories about them go back generations, and in tales handed down through the generations they became associated with the devil, hence their local name, the Devil's Bonfires. One resident remembers how back in the 1950s his granny would point towards Torside Castle and Glossop Low from their home in Old Glossop and mention 'the lights' which flickered and hovered above the Devil's Elbow. Ten years later, as a volunteer in the local mountain rescue team, he heard about them again when motorists began to report lights resembling distress flares hovering above the moors (John Taylor, pers. comm.)

In tradition, the Devil's Bonfires were said to hover around a mysterious mound near the summit of Bleaklow known as Torside Castle. Archaeologists believe the mound dates from the Bronze Age, others believe it is a natural lump of mud and rock left in a wake of the glaciers which once cut through the valley. Another tradition links the lights with phantom legions of Roman soldiers who are said to march along the Devil's Dyke, a Roman road lining the fort at Glossop with the Hope Valley in the east. 'Devil' names crop up frequently in this part of the hills, adding to its eerie reputation. Many folktales are concentrated in the area of the Devil's Elbow, a dangerous bend in the Glossop to Woodhead road above a deep cutting known as Ogden Clough. In folklore the Elbow was a dangerous boundary between the inhabited valley and the moor - a frightening place haunted by burning lights, the fairy folk and the Dark Lad or

T'Owd Lad, the local name for the devil or horned one.

In the 1960s, the new Peak District National Park authority built the first youth hostel at Crowden, not far from Woodhead. The hostel was designed to provide an overnight stop for walkers braving the first leg of the newly-opened long distance Pennine Way footpath which crosses Longdendale on its route north into West Yorkshire. It did not take long before visitors and wardens based at the hostel and surrounding cottages soon began to see beams and pulsating balls of coloured lights racing along the rocky gritstone crags on the remote western face of Bleaklow, along Bramah Edge and Shining Clough.

On occasions police and rescue teams turned out to search the craggy heights but found nothing. Then one fine summer's night in July 1970, teacher Barbara Drabble, who was at that time married to Peak Park warden Ken Drabble, was driving home to Crowden past the youth hostel when she suddenly passed through an invisible curtain which led into the Twilight Zone. It was, she told me ten years ago, 'a brilliant blue light'. It lit up 'all the bottom half of the mountain, all the railway, the reservoirs and about a two mile stretch of road.' The lights lasted several minutes and did not resemble daylight. It was 'brighter, clearer and harsher' and as Barbara drove into it she felt intensely cold, a sensation which caused the hair on the back of her neck to stand on end as if it had been affected by an electrical charge. 'It was just all over the whole valley lighting up, with perfect clarity, every single feature. It was certainly bright enough to drive without lights, and I can remember the clarity with which I could see the contour of the stone walling and the features on either side of the hills beside the road. The drive must have taken about five minutes and when I parked, or more accurately hurriedly abandoned, the car on arriving

home it had an icy sheen and felt cold" [2].

Barbara was so intrigued that she made a point of visiting local farmers, asking them what they knew about the light. They shuffled uncomfortably when put on the spot by an outsider, and kept what they knew to themselves. 'I drew a blank from everyone but their attitude made me feel they did see something,' she said. But one year later, more than a dozen people staying at Crowden Youth Hostel including the warden, Joyce Buckley, were dazzled by the same or a similar brilliant light which shined in through the windows. 'At first I thought it might be car headlights, but it reappeared on top of Bleaklow and no car can get up there,' said Mrs Buckley, who now lives in Manchester. 'It lasted three minutes, 25 seconds and was very powerful.'

The warden was so concerned about the light she called out a Mountain Rescue Search party, led by Mrs Drabble's husband Ken. He led a team who searched the moor in vain, and said afterwards: 'When we got to the top there was nothing - no trace of people, lights or even a fire.' What is more, Ken and the team searched the tops carrying big gas-powered searchlights whose reflectors were the size of a dustbin lid. But high up on the moor, the lightbeams thrown out by the searchlight looked like a twinkling candle to the people below in the Youth Hostel. The mystery light, they said, had filled the whole valley with its radiance. Discussing the events of that night for a TV reconstruction in 1996, Mr Drabble, now a senior Peak Park official, told me: 'I did not think someone was playing a trick. There were 15 people at the hostel that night and they did see something, and I would not disagree that it was something very mysterious.' [3]

After the sighting from Crowden Hostel, Barbara once again asked local farmers what they knew, and although reluctant to talk at first,

eventually they admitted they were familiar with the lights and had been for generations. 'One of them said they had known it to freeze young lambs when it came early in the year,' explained Barbara. 'Also someone said it had been coming for generations but never so close together as two years, usually about thirty or even fifty years in between. They were still reluctant to discuss it.'

Can spooklights be explained away?

The most common description in recent years is of a string of moving lights which have been mistaken for ramblers lost on the mountains. Others have seen balls of light and searchlight beams. These phenomena have been seen right along the 15 mile mountain ridge south of the valley, from Torside Castle and Bramah Edge on the west, to Shining Clough which overlooks Sean Wood's home at the head of the valley. So persistent have these reports become that the voluntary Mountain Rescue team have turned out from their Glossop base on numerous occasions when lights and 'flares' have been spotted, only to find the lights fade away like a will o'the wisp as they approach. The rescue team's Commander, engineer Phil Shaw, became fascinated by the lights when he spotted a mystery beam of light on the mountain 15 years ago, and now keeps a log of sightings. 'Between them, the seven mountain rescue teams in the Peak are called out once a year by people who see lights in the hills and assume someone is in trouble,' he told me [4]. 'This has been going on for at least 20 years but no one has ever been found. The reports have become so regular that the police no longer pass on reports of mystery lights to us unless they feel it is a genuine sighting of a red distress flare.'

Jim Exton, of the National Grid, has heard the stories and rules out the pylons which criss cross the valley bottom as having any connection with the lights. He says 'arcing and sparking' could be visible in wet weather and polluted air conditions, but the glow caused by it would be very difficult to spot from ground level. Scientist Dr Neil Charman, who has specialised in the study of ball lightning at Manchester University, rules this out as an explanation because it is so rare and due to the long duration involved in some of the reports from the valley. He has pointed towards the will o'the wisp as a more likely explanation. But as we have seen, what is a will o'the wisp?

Police and mountain rescue personnel point out that the entire Bleaklow plateau is on a major international flightpath for air traffic landing at Manchester Airport in the west, and it is quite possible that aircraft landing lights could be responsible for some of the UFO-type sightings of moving lights from the region. Others may have mistaken the flashing beacon of the giant Holme Moss TV transmitter to the north of the valley as a mystery light source when there have been unusual weather conditions at

work. But none of these theories explain the range of unusual light phenomena witnessed in the valley, or the traditional accounts of lights on the hills before the arrival of aeroplanes, pylons and other man-made sources of electricity.

To Wright Cooper, whose family have farmed the valley slopes at Tintwistle, near Woodhead, for more than four centuries, all the fuss about the lights is just 'something and nothing'. The Coopers have known about them for donkey's years, as he puts it. 'Today there is all this talk about flying saucers but people were seeing these lights above the Devil's Elbow way back in my grandfather's day,' he said. 'Only back then it was put down to the devil or witchcraft, today it's all aliens and UFOs.'

Notes:

- 1: Derbyshire Notes and Queries, *Derbyshire Advertiser & Mercury* Vol.10 No.505.
- 2: Barbara's first hand account of her experience initially appeared in *Peak Park News* summer 1972; a more detailed account was transcribed by the author in 1988, and Barbara appeared on *Strange But True: The Mystery of Dark Peak* on

the ITV network, November 1, 1996.

3: Interview with Ken Drabble, April 1996.

4: Personal communication from Phil Shaw, 1990.

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From R.W. Morrell

Indian *axis mundi*

In an effort to discern what he considers to be areas where East Asian belief systems and western concepts concerning the *axis mundi* approach each other, Chet Van Duzer (*At the Edge* No.9) exhibits a tendency to minimise, if not ignore, key differences between the two systems, one religious the other secular. The revolution in European geographical thinking initiated by the pioneering voyages of exploration by the Portuguese and Spanish around Africa, to India and the Americas, coupled with economic changes and military factors overturned the long established sacred geography of Christian Europe which had placed Jerusalem at the centre of the world. Mercator and his fellow cartographers and geographers catered for a maritime merchant class which was growing in power and influence and their work should be considered with this in mind, they could not abandon the *axis mundi* but they could and did relegate it to a part of the world which at the time was of no particular consequence. The same process did not operate for India, where the ancient sacred geography continued to hold sway, a situation which persisted even after the sub-continent came under European domination.

Hindu and Buddhist ideas of

where the centre of the earth is located are, in large measure, difficult for scientifically oriented Europeans to come to terms with, even when they subscribe to a religious superstition such as Christianity, as they allow for innumerable centres of the world in their sacred topography. This is a consequence of the source of their speculations concerning the *axis mundi*, namely, the earliest of the creation myths in the *Rigveda*, a work which has been described as the *terminus a quo* of Hinduism. Here we encounter the fight between Indra and the serpent-like demon, Vrtra, who held heaven and earth compacted and undifferentiated within a primordial mound which had risen up through the waters of chaos. Having killed Vrtra, Indra, so the myth relates, released heaven and earth along with the cosmic waters and the sun (it is unclear whether the sun was within the mound or in the water) and then in order to stabilise the earth he pegged it to the bottom of the cosmic ocean. He also propped heaven and earth apart, thereby creating space and the four continents, or quarters. It is the propping factor which gave rise to Hindu mythology and symbolism concerning the pillar (*skambha*), tree (*vanaspati*) and mountain (*mahameru*), all points of reference in Hindu thinking about the *axis mundi* and all capable of introducing an element of confusion as they can be, and are, used as interchangeable terms in Indian texts. A consequence of this is not simply to establish degrees of importance, such as the status of Mount Meru, but also allow for minor sites, which may appear *to us* of little or no consequence, to be considered as navels on par with Meru.

There is no general agreement amongst Hindus as to just where Meru is supposed to be located other than that it is not at the North Pole, which most of them have probably never heard of, Indian terrestrial

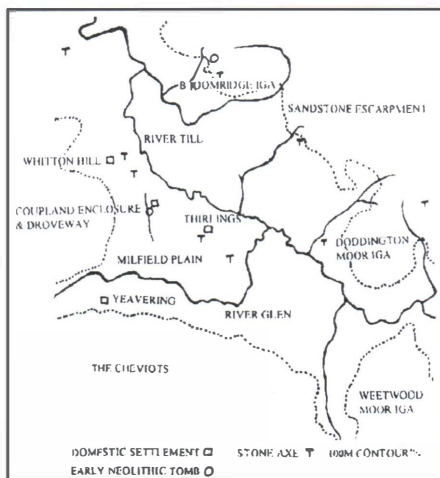
globe makers notwithstanding. Texts can be cited to show it to be a mountain, several mountains or even an entire mountain range. Some Hindus even point to actual mountains as Meru, Mount Arunachala springs to mind in this context. The average Hindu Brahman would agree with Mr Duzer that Meru was 'not near at hand', but 'far off to the north', however, they would reject out of hand his claim for it being 'on a separate, unattainable continent'. To counter this they need do no more than cite the story of the five brothers, which can be found in the *Mahabharata*, who went on pilgrimage to the mountain. Annually Hindus make long pilgrimages to temples such as Kedarnatha and Nara Nârâyana, which are traditionally thought to be situated close to Meru.

Although Buddhists also consider Meru to be a sacred site of considerable importance, for them it has been eclipsed by Mount Kailas (Gang Rinpoche), in fact much traditional Buddhist lore associates this with Meru. Four major Asian rivers have their sources within easy reach of the mountain, which makes the topography of the area similar to that said to surround Meru, as, for example, in Mr Duzer's 'catur-dvipa vasurnati', or 'four continent earth model', which he declares to be early and simplified, although the language of the term he cites is Pali not Sanskrit. In a footnote (20) he also asserts that Kailas is 'believed to be the physical embodiment or Avatar of the mythical Mount Meru.' But surely he knows that an *avatara* is the incarnation of a deity, or divine consciousness on earth born of free will? In Hindu belief Kailas is the home, or throne, of Siva and its area has long been the focal point for pilgrims, thus when the Buddhist, Pha dam pa Sangs rgyas, visited the district in the twelfth century he was mistaken by locals for a Saivite *sadu*. Buddhists have transformed

Siva into a tantric deity called Samvara, who, like Siva, has, they believe, his abode on the mountain.

Examples of *axis mundi* in India include stupas, temples, stone pillars and even particularly important trees, for tree worship is present throughout India. Ancient stupas, for example, had wooden (stone in Sri Lanka) axial pillars which ran from below the base to above the summit. In Hindu tradition a similar, if not identical, pillar is said to be present in Meru. The Deopara inscription, which dates from the twelfth century, likens this to a tree trunk (*mulakanda*), describing it as standing between the vault of heaven and the middle of the ocean, which can be taken as a reference to the cosmic ocean below which Indra 'pegged' the world to give it stability. In the *Vikramacharita* Meru's pillar is said to rise from sunrise to noon till it reaches the disc of the sun and then gradually sink. Interestingly, axial pillars in Sri Lankan stupas are called *Indra-kila* (Indra's peg).

Hindus find no logical inconsistency in there being a great many *axis mundi*, as they see them as part of a mystical concept. This is the cardinal difference between the scientific western approach to the concept, as found in the work of Mercator and that which prevails in India. There can be no substantive point of contact of the type Mr Duzer attempts to find.



At the Edge

ABSTRACTS

Abstracts in this issue compiled by Bob Trubshaw [RT] and Jeremy Harte [JH].

Northumberland's threatened treasure

One of the most important, though little-known, ritual landscapes in Britain is in the Milfield basin, Northumberland. Recent archaeological activity has revealed a whole series of ploughed-out Neolithic monuments - including what has been termed an early 'proto-henge'. Later ritual activity includes a major Anglo-Saxon site at Yeaving, on the southern edge of the basin. Despite the wealth of archaeological discoveries, the threat of large-scale quarrying remains. Mike Haigh provides an introduction to the prehistory of the Milfield Basin in *Northern Earth* No.73 p24-28. [RT]

Young folk

A survey of the Bristol region reveals that statues on buildings quickly acquire folklore. Buildings and statues no older than the eighteenth century have become associated with various motifs typical of folklore. P. Quinn 'Fact and folly: The folklore of "modern" sites', *3rd Stone* No.29 (Jan 1998) p8-11. [RT]

BVM meets Will o'the Wisp

A chapel at Mortel (which means 'marshy ground') in

Left: Early Neolithic sites in the Milfield Basin (see 'Northumberland's threatened treasure'.

Holland is known as Our Lady of the Wandering Lights and strongly suggests that this is dedicated to the 'will o'the wisp' or marsh lights. J. Palmer, 'Our Lady of the Wandering Lights', *3rd Stone* No.29 (Jan 1998) p19. [RT]

Crooked leys

Alby Stone's article 'The Crooked Otherworld Road' provides an overview of his book *Straight Track, Crooked Road: Leys, spirit paths and shamanism* (Heart of Albion Press 1998). *3rd Stone* No.29 (Jan 1998) p20-1. [RT]

Fairies and pixies

Anticipating the theme of this issue of *At the Edge*, the Little People of Dorset are described in detail by Jeremy Harte. 'Hidden Laughter: The Dorset fairy tradition', *3rd Stone* No.29 (Jan 1998) p25-8. [RT]

Doors, passages and rituals

Anthropological ideas about the liminality of doorways and passageways may offer the key to understanding Neolithic megalithic monuments such as passage tombs and perhaps also Bronze Age 'hill forts'. G. Children and G. Nash, 'Rites of passage and the cultural life of the doorway', *3rd Stone* No.29 (Jan 1998) p29-33. [RT]

Sussex mini henge

Construction of a pipeline near Chichester, Sussex, has revealed a series of circular ditches dating back to 2,000 BC with post holes for timber posts forming a 'mini Stonehenge' about 35 yards across. Red deer antlers had been placed at regular intervals around the outer ditch. *The Express* 19th Dec 1997 p15. [RT]

Britain's peculiar roads

Roads are one of the commonest features of the landscape but probably the most ignored by archaeologists. Paul Hindle's short article, 'Roads that ramble and roads that run' (*British Archaeology* No.31 Feb 1998 p6-7)

summarises some curious features of old roads.

Liminal executions

A number of Anglo-Saxon execution sites are known. Two-thirds are associated with prehistoric barrows and the rest with linear earthworks. All lie on boundaries – about a third on county boundaries and all but two on the boundaries of administrative units. Andrew Reynolds 'Executions and hard Anglo-Saxon justice' *British Archaeology* No.31 Feb 1998 p8–9. [RT]

Rock art without shamanism

Paul Bahn makes an impassioned attack on those who are interpreting rock art according to the 'shamanism' bandwagon, accusing unnamed scholars of 'distorted ethnography, dubious psychology and a huge amount of assumption and wishful thinking'. 'Stumbling in the footsteps of St Thomas', *British Archaeology* No.31 Feb 1998 p18. [RT]

Alternative academic archaeology

Excavation reports are becoming drier and drier, with interminable specialist reports and rare moments of interpretation. By way of contrast, Barbara Bender, Sue Hamilton and Chris Tilley report their work at the Bronze Age settlement at Leskernick on Bodmin Moor in a radically different style – including passages from personal diaries. Intervisibility of the hut entrances with the skyline and stone rows formed a major part of their investigations. Further work is needed to fully identify the 'shrines' incorporated into the houses. 'Leskernick: Stone worlds; Alternative narratives; Nested landscapes', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* Vol.63 (1997) p147–178. [RT]

Anglo-Saxon cathedrals on grids?

Some rather intriguing number-crunching and map work suggests that Anglo-Saxon

cathedrals may have been laid out at predetermined distances – presumably derived from Roman surveying techniques. J. Kelly and M. Ferrar 'Wood Hall: The Mystery of an Anglo-Saxon Cathedral', *Ancient* No.61 (Feb 1998) p15–18. [RT]

Death on the roads

What will happen to us after we die? Where will we go? We will go to Derbyshire, London and the Isle of May in Fifeshire, because that is where Purgatory is. This surprising information comes on the authority of a ghost rider who met his son on the road in Yorkshire and sought his prayers. See Robert Easting's 'Peter of Bramham's account of a chaplain's vision of Purgatory (c.1343?)', *Medium Aevum* 65 (1996) pp211–229, where other medieval ghost stories are discussed. [JH]

Monumental piety

On the Penrith-Appleby road there is a pillar marking the spot where Lady Anne Clifford last saw her beloved mother in 1616. It was the scene of an annual charity, distributed on the day of parting; it symbolised immortality, the Passion, and the standing stone set up by Jacob in Bethel; in short – as J. Wilson notes in 'Patronage and pietas: the monuments of Lady Anne Clifford', *Trans of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiq. & Arch. Soc.* 97 (1997) pp119–142, it was about as near to a wayside cross and chantry as Protestants were allowed to get. [JH]

Rock legends

Robin Hood's Penny Stone, a boulder of alternating gritstone and shale bands, was as round as a penny but slightly bigger at ten feet high. The hero threw it across the Calder Valley from Sowerby. In 'A stone axe-hammer, Robin Hood's Penny Stone and stone circle at Wainstalls, Warley near Halifax, West Yorkshire', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 69 (1997) pp9–20, Raymond A. Varley traces the history of this lost landmark and

sadly concludes that the stone circle around it was bogus. [JH]

Stones of contention

John Barnatt presents a conservation report with a twist in 'Excavation and restoration of the Doll Tor stone circle, Stanton, Derbyshire, 1994', *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal* 117 (1996) pp81–85. Work was done after the site had been radically rearranged and simplified by persons unknown for pagan ceremonies. Of course the Park authorities put it all back again, asserting the primacy of heritage interests over living faith. The measured prose of the report gives no indication of what Barnatt (once one of geomancy's best and brightest) feels about the conflict of interests involved. [JH]

Echoes of ritual

Percival Tumbull and Deborah Walsh report on a new timber ring for *Tr. of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiq. & Arch. Soc.* 97 (1997) pp11–44. After Sarn-y-Bryn-Caled, there's no getting away from the things. 'A prehistoric ritual sequence at Oddendale, near Shap' traces the transformation of this Neolithic feature into a setting of boulders, an early Bronze Age ring-cairn, an excarnation platform and a cremation pyre. Clearly the monuments involved are a by-product of the ritual acts practised there, rather than a theatre for them. [JH]

Squaring the circle

Warren R. Deboer has spent time in the ceremonial centres of the Chachi of Ecuador – large permanent houses, repeating the cosmological structures of daily life on a communal scale. He brings his insights to bear on archaeology in 'Ceremonial centres from the Cayapas (Esmeraldas, Ecuador) to Chillicothe (Ohio, USA)', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 7 (1997) pp225–253. The Hopewell mounds are analogous structures expressing a dualistic geometry of square

and circle, where animal symbolism is a shorthand for transformations between earth, water and sky. [JH]

More circles and squares

Two papers in *Essex Archaeology and History* 27 (1996) pp182-192 show how the plan and elevation of thirteenth-century monastic barns can be derived from a geometry of intersecting circles. Fascinating stuff, and Adrian Gibson - 'Further light on the design of the Great Barns at Cressing Temple' - and Laurie Smith - 'The geometrical designer at Cressing Temple' - show it works for other barns too. Old hands will remember that there was a vogue for this sort of thing in the 70s, when it was championed as Sacred Geometry. But since barns aren't sacred, doesn't this take some of the shine off the mysticism? [JH]

Landscape with rags

Part of the ritual to be followed in pilgrinage to the sacred Mount Kailas in Tibet involves stripping off and discarding items of clothing - quite a sacrifice in the Himalayan climate. Michael Freeman follows, camera at the ready, to record the pilgrims as they make their thousands of prostrations: 'Moving Mountain', *Geographical* 70ii (1997) pp40-44. [JH]

The road to elfland

Who was the elf of Elf Hill (now Ailcy Hill) at Ripon? The name is recorded in 1228 - and excavation has shown that the hill, a natural glacial mound, was studded with burials starting with the pagan Saxon era and continuing until the tenth century. R.A. Hall and Mark Whyman report in 'Settlement and monasticism at Ripon, North Yorkshire, from the 7th to 11th centuries AD', *Medieval Archaeology* 40 (1996) pp62-150. The old cult must have not only influenced but co-existed with the monastic foundation of

John Matthews and
Michael J. Stead

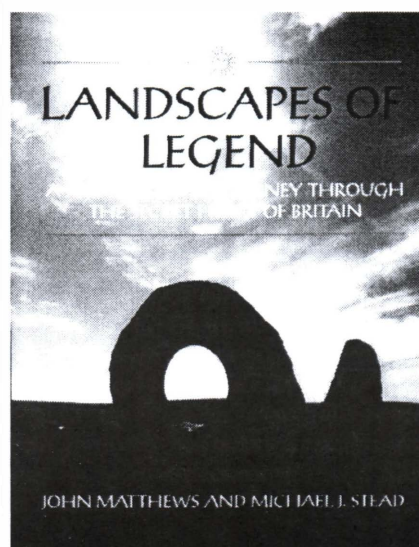
LANDSCAPES OF LEGEND

A Photographic Journey Through the Secret Heart of Britain

Blandford 1997

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Hey folks, a Blandford book without 'Celtic' or 'Arthur' in the title! With only 48 sites in *Landscapes of Legend* the selection is more-or-less restricted to the 'usual suspects' but the large-format photographs are so stunning that feelings of over-familiarity are avoided. Matthews' text provides informative background although, understandably, the emphasis is on mysterious legends rather than, say, the archaeologically-informative text of the companion volume by Mick Sharp (*Holy Places of Celtic Britain*), reviewed in *At the Edge* No.9.



Alastair Mack

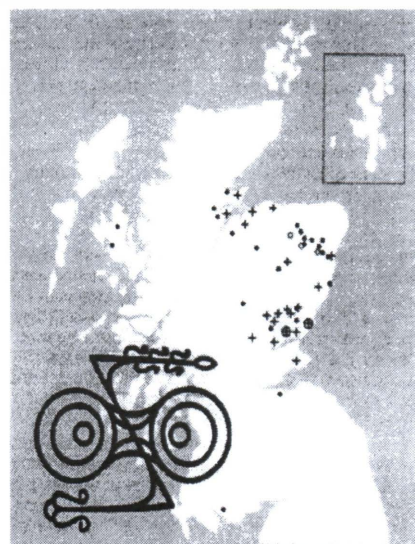
FIELD GUIDE TO THE PICTISH SYMBOL STONES

Pinkfoot Press 1997

258 x 110 mm, 191 pages,
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and maps, hardback £14.50

Everything you want to know about Scotland's enigmatic Pictish symbol - and how to find them. A brief introduction is followed by a discussion of the characteristic symbols - with some interesting distribution maps. The main part of this book is a comprehensive site-by-site gazetteer, organised by areas. Schematic route maps at the back of the book make it dead easy to organise visits in a sensible order.

All-in-all an excellent guide to some excellent antiquities.



The splendidly-named Pinkfoot Press have also published a booklet by Tom Gray and Lesley Ferguson entitled *Photographing Carved Stones* (1997) which provides plenty of practical guidance on how to light and photograph carvings - using Pictish carved stones for most of the examples, although the techniques they describe would be relevant to photographing a wide variety of other carvings.

**George Children and
George Nash**

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF LANDSCAPE:

**Neolithic sites of
Cardiganshire,
Carmarthenshire and
Pembrokeshire**

Logaston Press 1997

216 x 140 mm, 146 pages,
fully illustrated, paperback
£7.95

This book is the third in an unjustly-neglected series of exemplary guidebooks by these authors. An individual approach to 'setting the scene' for the Neolithic of south-west Wales includes comparisons with burial practices from the recent 'traditional' cultures of Papua New Guinea. The main part of the book comprises of a

site-by-site guide to the Neolithic monuments of the region, with concise but informative text, photographs and site plans. The layout is clear and effective, making this books very useable as guides.

From my personal experience I know that the siting of some of these Neolithic monuments in the landscape - such as many of the Pembrokeshire examples - is complex and fascinating. Nash and Children sometimes comment briefly upon such matters, although other authors (such as Christopher Tilley in *A Phenomenology of Landscape - Places, Paths and Monuments*, Berg 1994) have ventured further in this direction. The only noticeable omission is any mention for the folklore which has become linked with some of the sites. While this has, of course, no bearing on understanding the Neolithic cultures, such information has its own interest in revealing how people in recent centuries related to archaeological monuments.

Nash and Children have previously collaborated on two previous titles in this series: *Prehistoric Sites of*

Monmouthshire (1996) and *Prehistoric Sites of Herefordshire* (1994). This useful series also includes books by other authors on the castles of Herefordshire and Radnorshire.

THE RIGHT TIMES No.1

Spring Equinox 1998

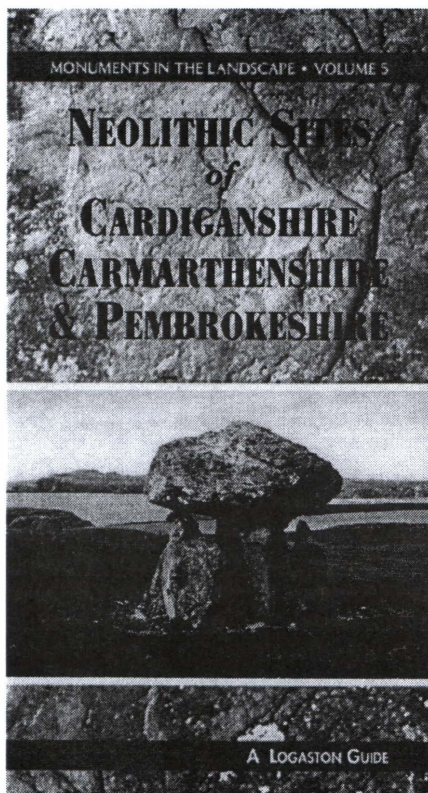
A4, 30 pages. £2.50

The team that started the Rollright Stones Appeal have now reformed as Friends of the Rollright Stones and launched a magazine, *The Right Times*, to promote their activities and generally make the world a better place. And a right effective little number the first issue is, too. Contents fall somewhere between an 'old school' earth mysteries magazine and the better pagan 'zines. Rants, recollections and useful information are intimately intermingled and span not only Rollright itself but other stone circles such as Boscawen-Un in Cornwall, Backstone Circle in West Yorkshire, an introduction to earth mysteries, an article on fairies (it seems all good magazines have at least one these days!) and various approaches to enhancing awareness of - and protection for - ancient sacred sites. Contributors not hiding behind obscure pseudonyms include Aubrey Burl, Paul Bennett and Mike Haigh.

The approach of *The Right Times* fills a real gap in the range of 'alternative' magazines and should prove to be well-received by a wide readership. To receive *The Right Times* you need to be a paid-up Friend of Rollright Stones - send £10.00 (UK), £15 (Europe), £20 (rest of world) to The Friends of Rollright Stones, PO Box 333, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX16 8XA. FFI on WWW visit www.rollrights.org.uk

Apologies for a short review section in this issue. As is often the case, publishers bring out all their best titles in time for the anticipated Yuletide spending spree, leaving a 'dead zone' in the early new year.

All reviews in this issue by
Bob Trubshaw.



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AT THE EDGE

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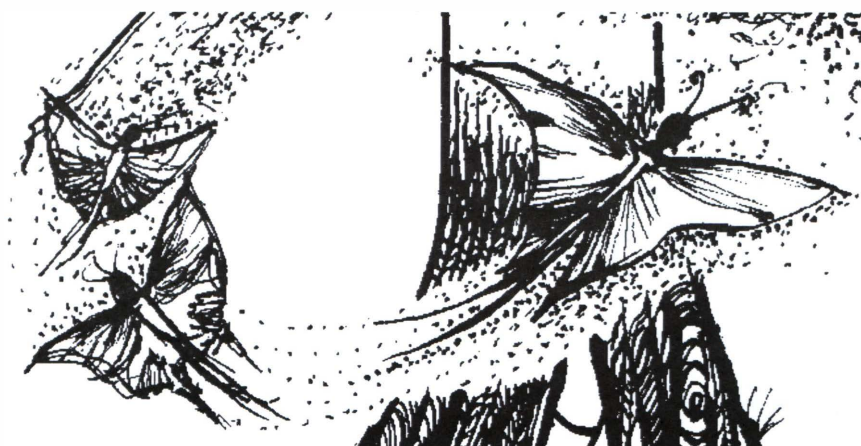
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Special Announcement

At the Edge is about to become bigger and better!

This is the last issue of *At the Edge* in its current form as I am very pleased to announce that *At the Edge* and *3rd Stone* are combining forces to create a magazine which looks much better than *At the Edge*, has a much bigger circulation, and which effectively covers all aspects of past and place - with a real balance of academic and 'non-academic' contributors.

Looking back

Allow me to reminisce. In the autumn of 1995 I was planning the transition from *Mercian Mysteries* to *At the Edge*. The aim was to 'walk on the cracks' between archaeology, folklore and mythology to provide an up-to-date insight into new interpretations of past and place. A secondary aim was to encourage more academic contributions and to make 'earth mysteries' just one among several approaches to past and place.

At this time Paul Devereux was editing *The Ley Hunter* and Danny and Jo-Anne Sullivan were producing *3rd Stone*. However, soon after *At the Edge* was launched, Paul handed over *TLH* to Danny, and Danny asked Neil Mortimer and Hilary Schraft to handle *3rd Stone*. Neil and Hilary hit the ground running and expanded on the editorial standard set by the previous editors of *3rd Stone*. As a result, Neil has

been able to dramatically increase the number of subscribers for *3rd Stone*.

However, Neil's editorial approach to *3rd Stone* meant that the content was much closer to the scope of *At the Edge* than had been the case when Danny and Jo-Anne were editing. Inescapably, *At the Edge* was now competing with *3rd Stone* for both subscribers and contributors. This seemed to be entirely unnecessary as both Neil and myself recognised that collaboration would be far more fruitful.

Looking forward

Despite much head-scratching to come up with a nifty new title, Neil and I have decided that the combined magazine should retain the title *3rd Stone*. Existing *3rd Stone* readers will find that they are exposed to more folklore and mythology than has been normal since Neil took over: *At the Edge* readers will find that they get even more archaeological content.

At the Edge subscribers will find a complimentary copy of the current *3rd Stone* enclosed.

Unless you instruct me otherwise before the end of June all outstanding *At the Edge* subscriptions will be transferred to *3rd Stone*.

Those who already subscribe to both magazines will have their *3rd Stone* subscription automatically extended.

Subscribers who are happy to receive the new 'augmented' *3rd Stone* need do nothing - the next issue of *3rd Stone* is scheduled to appear in July and will be sent to you on publication. If you are not happy with this proposal then please contact me **before the end of June** and I will refund any remaining *At the Edge* subscriptions.

What about me, you might be thinking? To be honest, after nearly eight years of producing a new issue of *Mercian Mysteries* or *At the Edge* every three months, I will be grateful for the chance to step off the treadmill! Nevertheless, I will still have an active involvement in *3rd Stone* as part of the editorial team supporting Neil Mortimer. And there is still a backlog of Heart of Albion publications to get out - hopefully most of these will appear within the next year. After that perhaps I should 'get a life'! The reality is more probably that my day job will become increasingly demanding, although I hope to have enough 'spare time' to take Heart of Albion further into pioneering 'short run' electronic publishing.

My grateful thanks to all the people who have contributed articles, illustrations and letters to *At the Edge* and *Mercian Mysteries* over the years and to those who have subscribed - quite literally none of this would have happened without you all!

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